The **future** of **electronic entertainment** issue#114

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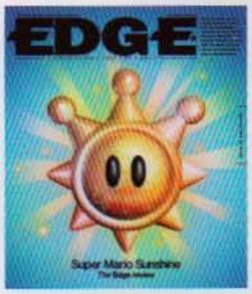
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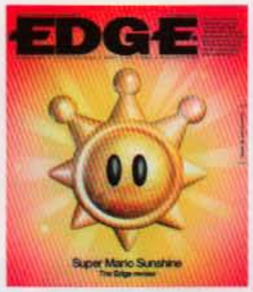
Xbox piracy: the ne
Previewed: Burnout
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Super Mario Sunshine
The Edge review







Page 80. Go on, it's quite alright – you can always return to this at a later stage.

Back? Then we'll begin. **Edge** is in a summer mood. The windows are wide open; the fans are trying to persuade the office's hot, heavy air to go play in the sun; nothing seems particularly pressing. Until Mario arrives.

Big Nintendo summer releases are part of videogaming tradition. Like **Edge**, over the course of their gaming lives older gamers are likely to have had several holidays exhaustively branded by pre-128bit classic NCL experiences: electronic entertainment that consumes your every thought; that locates and extracts your most obsessive traits kicking and screaming from your deepest subconscious; that won't let go until every star is collected, every secret discovered; and the whole affair is elegantly wrapped in the laissez-faire attitude only warm weather can inspire. It's the pinnacle of videogaming.

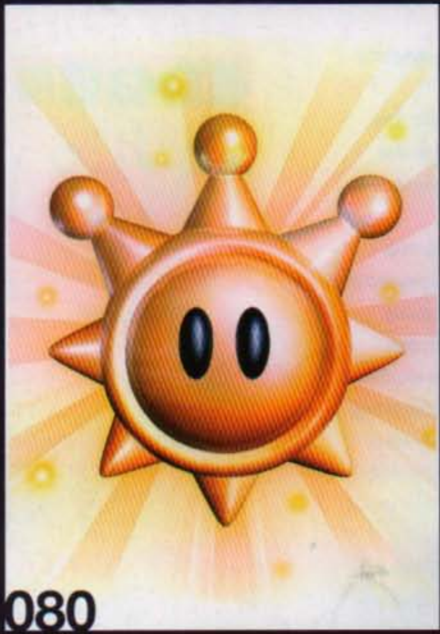
It's well timed, too. Without Mario things would otherwise feel overly lethargic (from the console owner's perspective, at least). The Great Summer Slowdown returns (the continued polarisation of the industry around the Christmas and Easter periods that results in a dramatic reduction in even software allocation throughout the year) and it's a condition that is only likely to become increasingly accentuated. Formats go into hibernation; the European videogaming press shuts down; the industry just sits and waits.

One interesting disturbance in this otherwise sleepy village mentality is the increased support for GBA titles, probably the only platform that thrives during the summer months. The other is a major, genuine triple-A release which instantly drowns out any thoughts of a videogame drought. Of course, the trouble is that companies such as Nintendo don't release titles of *Mario*'s calibre every July. Frozen by commercial timidity, they wait for the cooler air to return.

But that's the autumn. A whole world away. For now just sit back and enjoy the *Sunshine*.



Features



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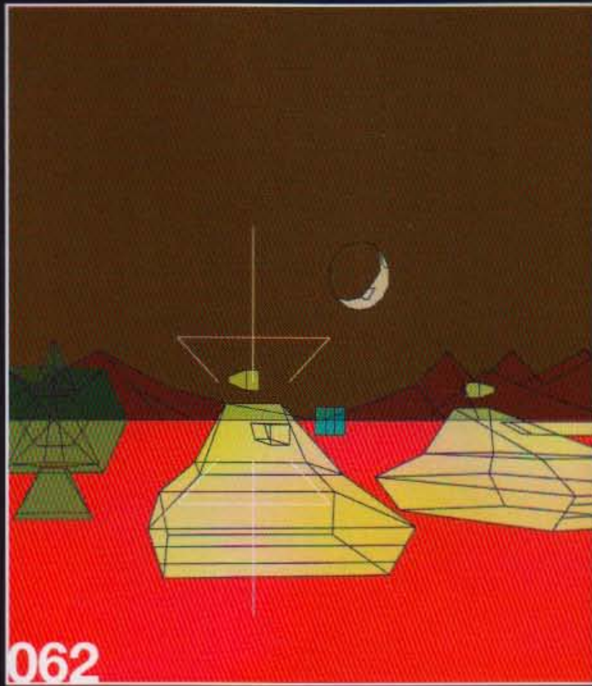
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the 'sunshine' issue













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Regulars

Testscreen

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"His name is Jaws. He kills people."


MESSIAH-X
Actel

frontend



Crackers' delight

Microsoft has plenty to lose as Xbox gains a series of mod chip advancements that will open up amateur development on an unprecedented scale for a console

During early June of this year, MIT grad student **Andrew Huang** submitted a paper for publishing that detailed the workings of the Xbox security system. It was an event that received a large fanfare across the Internet, not because of the complexity of the research involved, but due to the consequences of such an investigation. Microsoft may balk at a description of the Xbox as a stable, fixed-spec PC in a box, but it's a potentially appropriate classification given the possibility of modifications, piracy and homebrew software to transform the console.

While Microsoft's decision to enter the hardware market has won it plaudits for the technical anatomy of the Xbox, it's also entered the company into uncharted territory regarding piracy. Whereas consoles have always suffered widespread piracy issues, they've been restrained somewhat thanks to the dedication of the hardware. Microsoft's forward-thinking Trojan horse, however, is in danger of looking overloaded. While Sony is encouraging a slow-burning, regulated tendency towards the homebrew community with gentle nudges at convergence such as the PS2 Linux Development kit, sudden advancements in the field of Xbox modding are threatening to open up piracy channels in an unprecedented and unregulated manner.

This sudden flashpoint of piracy seems to have stemmed from the fact that the Xbox security key is not unique, and is identical in all shipped hardware. In the words of Huang: "If you ship your secrets in your hardware, it's a good assumption that the users will eventually – and perhaps quickly – know them."

This published report isn't solely accountable for the emergence of Xbox mod chips though. Several such implants have been available since May from specialist online exporters. One of the first announced, the NeoX chip, never materialised, with the people responsible for the project stating that it was discontinued for "various reasons", leading to obvious speculation regarding Microsoft's legal involvement. Another, the Enigmah chip, was released and then canned for legal reasons. However, this turned out to have more than a whiff of publicity stunt around it as the project was reborn as X-ecuter, a phoenix of a chip that, predictably, is far more capable. What is even more striking about this reinvention is that far less technical nous is required to install it, relying on basic soldering methods as opposed to precision micro-soldering.

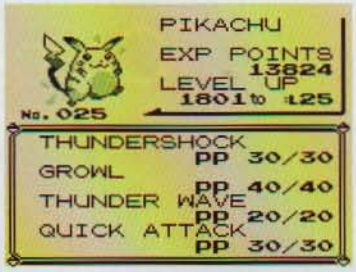
The most widespread of current mods, however, is the X-Tender, a chip available since late May, and one that purports to convert any region-specific console into a multi-region box capable of accepting CD-RW, DVD-R and DVD-RW media. It's also mooted to enable the reading of unsigned code, as well as patched and modded files, opening the floodgates for a tsunami of software, both homebrew or otherwise.

> "To be totally honest, 95 per cent of people will buy a chip to play copied games. Piracy is a massive problem, and it's a shame"

According to **Ian Callaghan**, the director of the Pandora chip project (www.pandorachip.com), "The homebrew scene is just amazing, having exploded just a few weeks after the first mod chips were released. People all around the world have started writing tools, emulators and even operating systems for the console. They are being given a chance to display their technical skills and open up the potential of the machine to make it more enjoyable for everyone." It's a fairly idealistic viewpoint that few with a vested interest in Xbox would concur with, but Callaghan is quick to counter: "I don't agree with piracy as I understand the hard work involved with the development of a game, but I think it's a Catch 22 situation. If games retailed at a lower price point, the volume of sales would increase and piracy would just fade away." However welcome though a reduction in software RRP would be, it's a staunch ethos that few believe is a pragmatic solution to piracy. However, it is one shared by such willing consumers of pirate efforts, such as schoolchildren (see 'Piracy In The Playground' in **E**113). Given the potential prevalence for Xbox modification, they may soon be able to once again exercise that opinion, as grass roots piracy begins to stem beyond the realm of PlayStation and PS2.



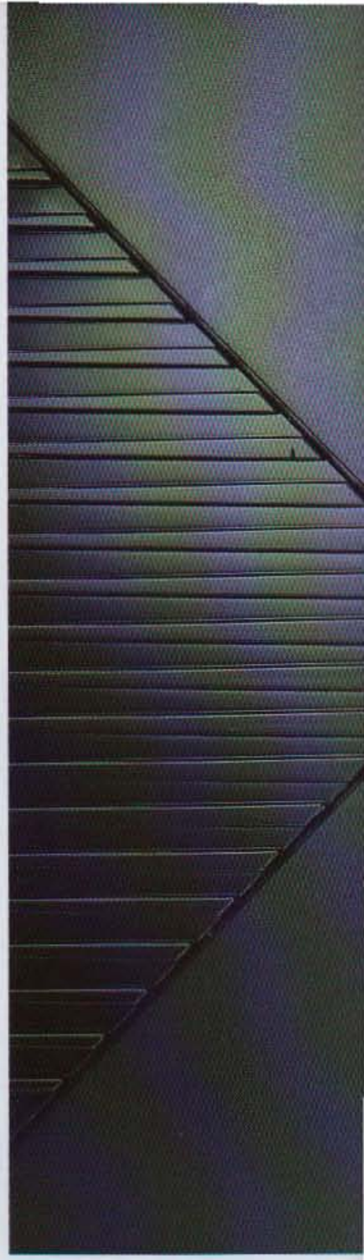












Just some of the software available to owners of chipped Xboxes and a few emulation programs (clockwise from top left): *Final Fight* (coin-op); *Mario Bros.* (NES); *Pokémon* (Gameboy); *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* (SNES); *Sonic The Hedgehog* (Mega Drive); *Quake II* (PC)

It's arguable that piracy is highly dependent, in limpet fashion, on the homebrew scene, and it's an argument that Callaghan reluctantly acknowledges: "To be honest, 95 per cent of people will buy a chip to play copied games. Piracy is a massive problem, and it's a shame." Is that remaining 5 per cent enough to justify the existence of unregulated non-pirate hacking? "It will aid sales of the console. Maybe Microsoft will see this, and even release a public development kit. I'm sure that homebrew can exist without piracy."

Paul Fox, head of PR, Xbox EMEA, takes an equally idealistic, but directly contrary, stance to the question of dependence: "I don't believe that one can exist without the other as piracy relies on exploiting the technological know-how of the homebrew scene. As long as there is money to be stolen, somebody will invest great effort to enable it. All consumer electronic devices are subject to reverse engineering attempts – it's been happening to videogames for the last 30 years and will continue for the next 30."

"Exploring the security measures of a console is part of the fun, even though the programmer has no interest in playing copied games"

Just Like That

While analysts aren't completely convinced that such chips will promote the propagation of peer-to-peer piracy on the scale of, say, MP3 transactions, their reasoning for such conclusions are thanks to the awkward integration of mod chips into the Xbox hardware. Besides disassembling the Xbox case, mod chips have required over 20 soldering operations and connections to be properly integrated. Chips such as X-ecuter, however, are now complete enough to require just a single wire in order to be incorporated within the motherboard.

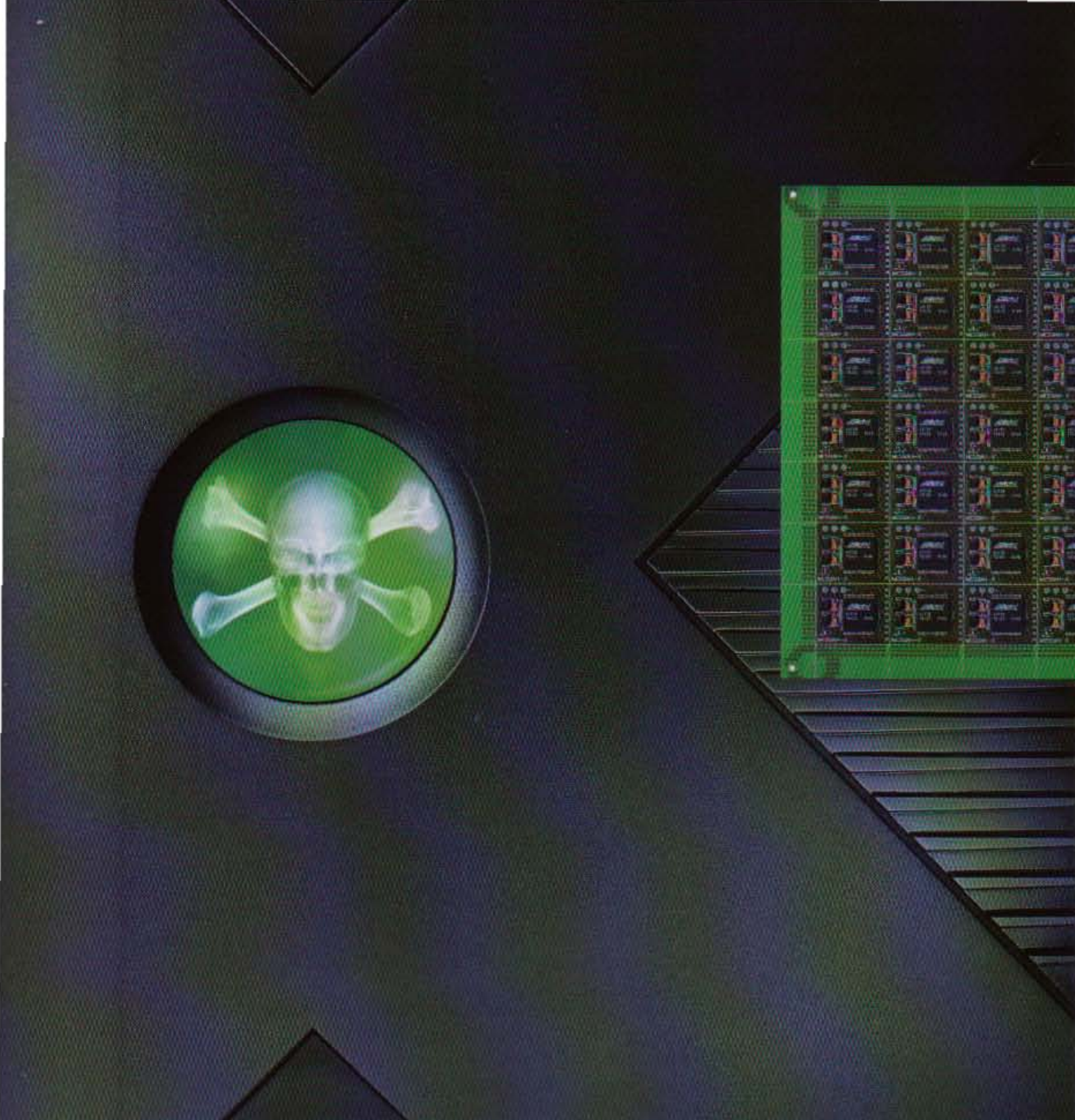
A bigger threat, and one that discounts any arguments about the esoteric availability of Xbox modification, is the possibility of "flashing"; a technique that requires no chipping in order to alter the console. The role of a mod chip is to replace the Xbox BIOS with a hacked version, thus facilitating the use of multi-region software or homebrew concoctions. Flashing, however, induces a similar effect without the need for a chip. It still requires substantial effort, but it's more difficult for Microsoft to circumnavigate. Microsoft refuses to pass comment on such operations as "It is our policy not to discuss pending legal issues," says Fox. According to Callaghan: "To flash an Xbox, it's still necessary to solder a certain portion of the motherboard in order to allow takeover of the BIOS."

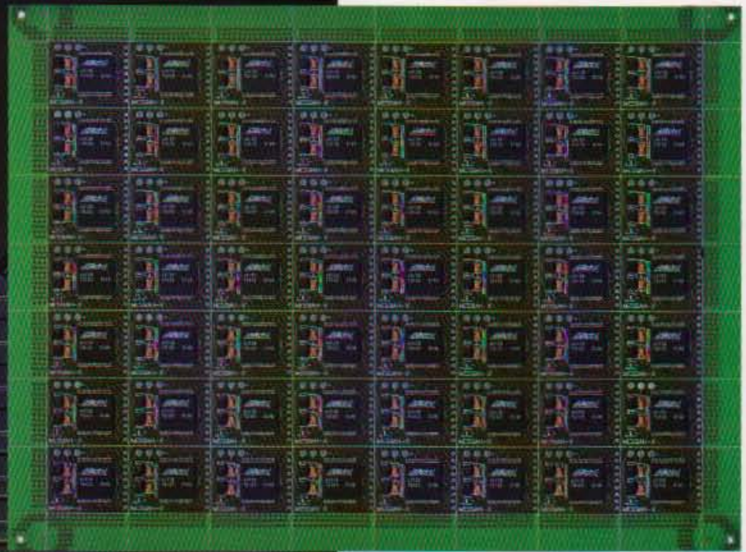
Not only is it an effective procedure that could jemmy open the floodgates for piracy in widespread manner, it's also completely illegal. While chipping, though frowned upon as the willing accomplice in the crime, is a legal grey area, flashing requires the use of a modified version of the Xbox BIOS program, which constitutes a breach of copyright.

EZ PC

Microsoft's biggest worry comes from attempts to convert the Xbox into a cheap PC. In the worst case scenario, the level of control that Microsoft can exercise over the Xbox, and its role as a connected broadband device, may begin to tend towards those of a PC. Says Callaghan: "Exploring the protective security measures of a console is part of the fun, even though the programmer has no interest in playing copied games. The Xbox scene will be huge, as all decent PC crackers and hackers will be able to turn their skills and attentions to the platform. The potential is endless."

Particularly given Andrew Huang's paper, and the knowledge of the security key of the current batches of Xbox consoles that are in living rooms across the world. With such measures circumvented, it's possible to expose the unique ID of each machine, raising issues regarding user privacy and lost revenues through bypassing the Xbox Live service. This is the crux of the issue for Microsoft, as it has multiple channels of revenue, and not just the single stream generated by software, that could be siphoned away as the homebrew scene expands.





A sheet of newly manufactured mod chips from the Messiah factory in China

Microsoft's action so far has been to quash any developments as they emerge, including software that isn't directly linked with piracy but still facilitates it. Whereas Sega took a more sanguine approach to the homebrew community, and even condoned it on an unofficial level, Microsoft are taking a zero-tolerance approach to any releases. Xbox MAME, a fully-functioning arcade emulator that would play MAME roms but required a chipped machine, was closed down the moment it gained widespread release over the Web. Fox once again refuses to pass comment on the specifics of pertinent legal matters such as the MAME case, but adds a general caveat: "While the hacking of game consoles is not a new phenomenon, neither is the fact that we will pursue those who infringe our and our partners' intellectual property." Clarifies Callaghan: "Microsoft closed down the MAME project due to the developers using an official Dev Kit, which was illegally released on the Internet and is only intended for legitimate developers." Microsoft forced the webmaster of xbox.mame.net to remove all binaries of the release, and the site is now closed. The source code, however, is still available, and it's perfectly legal to compile, provided an official SDK is not used.

Adds Callaghan: "I would say it's also a Big Brother statement of intent; Microsoft showing the world it will fight back."

Microsoft might have several channels of investment in Xbox, but does this mean that it should be any more vigilant and less tolerant than other console manufacturers? "The industry as a whole has a responsibility to address issues which arise from piracy, and not just from a revenue standpoint. The whole industry is damaged by sub-standard, pirated material," says Fox, rather disingenuously. "That said, the vast majority of Xbox owners are not focused on this issue. Instead they are focused on getting their hands on great games," he continues, before reminding **Edge** of just how many great games are in the pipeline.

Regardless of line-ups, however, the attraction of emulation of several revered formats is an attractive prospect for many, especially if it can become available, accessible and widespread. It's a scene that, at the very least, is as fertile as the Dreamcast during its heyday as the homebrew machine of choice (see 'Remodelling the Dreamcast', **E**93). At present, commonly emulated formats (NES, SNES, GBA etc) are being constructed for Xbox but on top of this, other pieces of viable software, such as VCD, MP3 and DivX players and *Quake II* are primed for release. Such software will, for the moment, require a chipped Xbox to circumvent the BIOS; the possibility of a Utopia-style boot disc is currently remote. "A boot disc could be created," explains Callaghan, "but it would need to be factory produced. Microsoft use dual layered DVDs called D9 (due to their 9 gigabyte capacity). One layer of the DVD holds the game data, and the other layer holds Microsoft's digital signature. The Xbox reads these DVDs in a special way, so if a boot disc was to be created, it would need to be factory produced to that specification. I think it will see the light of day, eventually."

In particular, people are working on Linux and making their own Xbox compilers, which would obviate the need for Microsoft's own dev kits. Such sites as the Xbox Linux Project (http://xbox-linux.sourceforge.net/) contain regular updates on progress, and even make mention of an anonymous donor offering up $200,000 (£130,000) for anyone who finds a completely legal way to run Linux on Xbox before the year is out. "I think Linux is just an open-source statement to Microsoft," comments Callaghan. "It's one of the many operating systems we'll be seeing, and no one can get in the way of that." At the time of writing, there have been several reports of people making inroads towards producing a version of Linux without legal entanglements. It's the first few steps of converting the Xbox into a Linux-based PC, without making use of official development kits.

One certain consequence is that the scene will burgeon in the coming months, and Microsoft's actions could be viewed as little but damage limitation designed to drive the scene into an increasingly invisible underground status. Some would say that the only action that can be taken against piracy is to remove it from the public eye, as Fox's admission to piracy being a permanent fixture attests. With its investment in the console market extending far deeper than providing an operating system, it's a crucial issue for Microsoft to attend to, and, seemingly, one of the major obstacles for the software-giant turned hardware-fresher.

GDCE gets Academic

This year's IGDA Academic Summit reflects timely convergence of academic and development communities



The second annual Game Developers Conference Europe, which is to run from August 27-29 at Earls Court Exhibition Centre, will this year feature an IGDA sponsored Academic Summit. The inclusion of the event follows the success of a similar two-day conference that took place earlier this year at GDC in California, and reflects the growing convergence between the development and academic communities.

The reasons for extending the conference to Europe are simple, according to the IGDA's **Jason Della Rocca**, who is organising it. "Over the past year the IGDA's Education Committee, led by industry veterans Warren Spector and Doug Church has been doing a lot of work to build bridges with the academic community. For gaming to have a healthy future, the two sides must cultivate a deeper understanding of the ideas that drive gaming, the experiences games offer to players and the implications of those ideas and experiences on the aesthetic and cultural significance of this young art form."

"One lecturer told me they were interested in 'shoot-me-ups', while many think the most innovative game ever is *Myst*"

Matthew Southern, of Liverpool John Moores University agrees. "This summit allows us to break some hermetic seals, but it also reminds us that within each 'world' there are a plurality of approaches, attitudes and priorities, which can often conflict. More disagreement and critique will lead to more robust theorising and development, and the summit provides the platform for this debate."

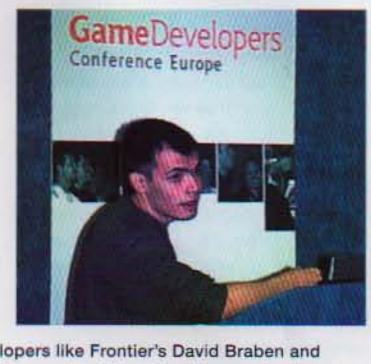
The Academic Summit comes at a time of increased interest in videogame development from the academic community, as demonstrated by several recent academic conferences such as Bristol University's 'Game Cultures' session (**E**101) and the launch of 'Game Studies', an academic journal devoted to the medium (**E**109). Recent months have also seen the Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference in Finland, which featured Warren Spector as a keynote speaker (www.gamesconference.org/cfp.html), and a series of lecture sessions at E3.

The advantages of such interest for the videogame industry are broadly threefold: trained developers, working from a common body of technical expertise; the evolution of a critical vocabulary and theory of gameplay; and the development of gaming techniques and products as tools of learning. There's also the fact that academics can pursue concepts and prototypes that might not be sustainable in a commercial environment. As **Emma Westecott**, of Zero-Game Studio, puts it, "We all have much to gain from working together; a highly educated workforce, theoretical analysis of the medium from an applied, academic and cultural perspective and resources to support the art, science and business of making games."

But the IGDA isn't the only organisation showing an interest in the potential synergies between academia and the development community. The UK's professional trade body, TIGA, is also doing its bit for academic/development osmosis, as CEO, **Fred Hasson**, points out. "We set up an education Special Interests Group (SIG) in January this year and, preceding that, we did a trade mission to Japan to look at the creative process and the differences between how they do it in Japan and how we do it here." As he goes on to point out, there's also a lot of links between universities and developers at a local level. "Blitz, for example, has links with Warwick University, and I think Hothouse has done stuff with Bristol."

The main significance of TIGA's involvement is the work that it's doing towards evolving common educational standards. "Back in January when we had our first meeting, we agreed to set up some working groups with a company called Skillset and basically mapped out the different skills that relate to being part of a development team. At the end of the summer, we'll be doing a roadshow round the country to present the findings of this report, and to get feedback from a larger community of people. If they don't like the

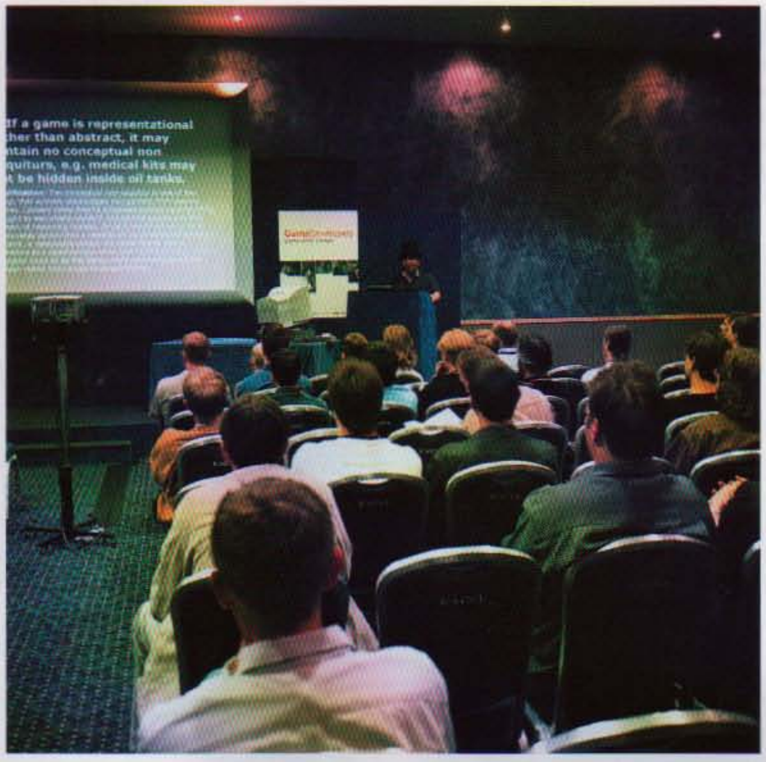




Last year's GDCE saw contributions from developers like Frontier's David Braben and Elixir Studios' Demis Hassabis (above right). This year they'll be joined by academics



London's Earls Court Exhibition Centre will provide the venue for this year's GDCE, which precedes ECTS 2002



way it's set out, this gives them a chance to say so. The actual benefits are that it will help accreditation of courses, it'll help companies in job evaluation and recruitment, it'll help with qualification design, and I think those are very important factors."

In spite of the positive steps being taken by IGDA and TIGA, some developer resistance to academic intrusion remains. As **Jesper Juul** of the University of Copenhagen puts it, "A serious problem is that many academics have simply played too few games, but I think it is becoming established that a game scholar has to be as knowledgeable about games as a movie scholar has to be about movies." But though things might be changing, Southern can still recount one or two academic horror stories: "I was recently invited to validate a new degree in game study and design. The course leader effectively said that the staff did not play that many games, but that they 'would do over the next couple of months', and that on such a 'modern course', the students would bring and play their own choices. If that were a film course, and the leader 'only read plays', but 'intended to watch a few soon', they would arguably be sacked. Bandwagon-jumping is common – institutions take modules from film and multimedia courses, add 'games' to the title and watch the applications treble. One lecturer told me they were interested in 'shoot-me-ups'. Many think the most innovative game ever is *Myst*, and many over-emphasise the importance of narrative. Videogames are lumped in with 'multimedia' and 'interactive art', when in fact they are videogames."

"It is becoming established that a game scholar has to be as knowledgeable about games as a movie scholar has to be about movies"

But Hasson is optimistic that TIGA's involvement can eliminate such bad practice. "We need to ensure that we've got an affordable base of well-qualified people working in the industry and therefore we don't want universities to waste any effort in producing the wrong people – which we've seen happen in the broadcast industry and the general media industry, where there's a low perception of media studies degrees.

Which is why I think we need to concentrate on evolving a common language. If you look across the whole of the business issues to do with development, I don't think we've got a very evolved discourse or dialogue or debate going on."

It's this need for evolved discourse that is shaping the current confluence of academia and development. Going forward, the IGDA plans to make the Academic Day and Summit yearly activities at GDC in America and Europe. Anybody interested in the area should contact Jason Della Rocca (jason@igda.org) about getting involved.

What's on the agenda

The IGDA Academic Summit will take place on August 27, and consists of the following sessions:

Curriculum Case Studies – highlighting universities that have already implemented videogame related courses. Speakers include Matthew Southern of the International Centre for Digital Content at Liverpool John Moores University and Jon Purdy from the University of Hull.

Games & Learning – a panel discussing the potential for games to be used as tools for learning, moderated by Simon Le Jeune, and organised in association with TIGA's Education SIG.

IGDA Curriculum Framework – in which IGDA's Education Committee discusses its work towards establishing a game-oriented curriculum.

Games Research: Impact & Strategies – a panel featuring Charles Cecil and Jesper Juul and moderated by Emma Westecott to discuss the benefits and role played by academic research in videogame development.

Open Discussion – moderated by Jason Della Rocca, letting everyone in attendance ask questions or make a contribution.

Student Sponsorships Presentation and Speeches – consisting of three short speeches by some of the 25 students sponsored to attend GDCE, sponsored by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe and Argonaut Games.

Visit www.gdc-europe.com or www.igda.org or contact Jason Della Rocca on jason@igda.org for more information.

Digital distribution takes off

Console big boys continue to drag their feet, but digital distribution of gaming content is fast becoming a reality

Recent months have seen the more extreme elements of the Internet rumour-monger community touting all sorts of possibilities regarding PlayStation3. Specifically, rumours have touched upon the possibility that the next instalment of Sony's behemoth brand will move towards exclusively downloadable content at the expense of physical storage media. Nevertheless, both Sony and Microsoft continue to drag their feet when it comes to getting this generation of gamers online, while Nintendo hasn't even got as far as dragging its feet. But the utopian vision of digital distribution isn't far off, and a handful of companies are already paving the way for secure downloading of gaming content, and are poised to take advantage of the expected, though tardy, broadband boom.

Tornado Virtue, for example, currently offers secure delivery of digital downloads through its Secure Digital Delivery System, already in use by websites such as Virgin Megastore and Books Online. After a recent merger with Virtue Broadcasting, a streaming and webcasting company, the company is no longer focusing on in-store kiosks (as it was in **E**93), but given the open architecture of its systems, this remains a possibility. The main focus, though, is online distribution. The company's system presents customers with an http link that allows immediate download after completion of a credit card transaction, with an applet ensuring that the process can be continued if it's interrupted for any reason.

As **Neil Ferris**, the company's CEO argues, the chief advantages of the system are choice and convenience: "Retailers get to offer a greater product range to consumers without having to invest or develop extensive systems to securely store and deliver the digital games. Tornado Virtue takes care of the storage and fulfilment of digital orders, meaning that the performance of the retailers' websites are not affected by the downloads." Currently the company has agreements with several publishers, including Codemasters and Empire, and Take2 Interactive.

The utopian vision of digital distribution isn't far off, and a handful of companies are already paving the way for secure downloading

But while Tornado pursues the traditionally mooted form of online distribution, Tribeka's SoftWide delivery system is potentially more interesting. Unlike Tornado, Tribeka continues to offer in-store digital distribution, offering an alternative to end-users downloading content at home, but still carrying the advantages of reduced costs and increased choice. Significantly, its widespread adoption may also help to reduce the deleterious effects that current retail monopolies have on the creative success of the industry, and is likely to be unaffected should the widespread adoption of broadband take longer than expected.

Founded in 1997 by CEO, **Daniel Doll Steinberg,** the company's system allows retailers to burn CDs in-store, as well as printing a label and manual that are of comparable quality to those contained in conventional boxed software. Having conducted trials with the likes of Dixons and WHSmith, the company currently has agreements with with 150 software publishers, such as Eidos, Activision and Lego.

With five systems already in place at the moment, French chain FNAC is planning to roll out SoftWide on a commercial basis towards the end of this year, and Computer World (formerly Time) is also making use of the system. Furthermore, Tribeka itself is planning to open three stores itself, in a bid to demonstrate the system's potential and add a revenue stream to that generated by the transactions conducted by other retailers.

The system currently covers software for PCs, Macs, PDAs and Linux platforms, though the company is in talks with Sony and Microsoft about the possibility of extending this to consoles – particularly now that it's becoming feasible to produce DVDs. "We're still working on getting DVD fast enough and economical enough for it to be viable," explains Steinberg. "At the moment the generation costs are too expensive for a game, but that's consistent with the fact that in 1998 CDs were too expensive, so as DVD becomes cheaper we will move forward with it."

And although wide-eyed analysts have





Tribeka's CEO, Daniel Doll Steinberg (above), founded the digital download company in 1997, frustrated by the refusal of software retailers to stock software for his Apple Mac



been predicting that the rise of broadband will bring with it the demise of bricks and mortar retailers, Steinberg is bullish about the continued good prospects for his company. "The software market is growing substantially every year. So if widespread broadband penetration comes about in 2007, the market could be twice the size, and assuming broadband takes half the market, then the retail market is still as large as it is today. And it's not even certain that broadband will have established itself by then."

Steinberg goes on to point to the obvious advantages of such a distribution mechanism. "Retailers benefit from increased product range and guaranteed stock. Instead of having hundreds of titles for day one that they don't know will last for a week or six months, they would be able to manufacture units on an as-needed basis, as a 'just-in-time' mechanism.



Tornado Virtue CEO, Neil Ferris (left) has moved away from in-store downloads



Tribeka's recently opened flagship store, on the King's Road in Chelsea, provides a showcase for the potential of the SoftWide system. Several other retailers are set to follow

If retailers pass on cost savings to customers, lower costs will mean a wider choice of software – gamers will truly be able to vote with their wallets

Other products might not be worth a retailer's while to stock, except in low numbers, so this is also a way for them to carry a full range of software, requiring less shelf space."

Meanwhile, publishers benefit from efficency: "Publishers benefit from a wider product range in store; a more efficient channel to store – *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire*, for example, was bought by everyone, but WHSmith couldn't get a copy for two months last year, so Eidos and WHSmith were losing lots of potential sales. And we can probably offer increased margins to publishers because the model's efficient and they don't have costs associated with distribution or returns."

But while the benefits to retailers and distributors can't be overlooked, it's the benefits to consumers that **Edge** is most interested in. If retailers pass on cost savings to customers, lower costs will complement a wider choice of software. Gamers will be able to truly vote with their wallets: obscure titles that would be quickly pulled from store shelves by current retailers would be constantly available using such a system – resurrecting the possibility of a sleeper hit, or a word-of-mouth success. Which is why it's such an intriguing development.

CUTTINGS



Halo lined up for PC as Xbox goes Live
Microsoft has finally announced PC and Macintosh versions of *Halo: Combat Evolved*, due for release in summer 2003. The two versions will be developed by Gearbox Software and Westlake Interactive respectively. The company has also reported that *Project Gotham Racing* and *Dead or Alive 3* have reached worldwide sales of more than a million units, with US hardware sales increasing by 131 per cent in the wake of the May price cut. The news isn't all good though – 'Red Herring' magazine recently claimed that Microsoft is losing \$750m (£525m) on the Xbox this fiscal year, with next year's losses expected to top \$1.1bn (£720m). Nevertheless, Microsoft's cash pile is more than sufficient to sustain such losses in the interests of achieving widespread presentation of Xbox Live – which, it has also been announced, will benefit from broadband infrastructure services supplied by Level 3 Communications in North America and Europe. Expect a full report next issue.

Sega denies acquisition rumours
Following interviews with Reuters and the Wall Street Journal, in which Sega declared its intent to acquire US and European software houses, director Hiroyuki Soga recently stepped in to deny reports that the company was in talks with Infogrames and Midway. With EA the only potential acquisition target ruled out in interviews, speculation saw the share prices of several companies receive a brief fillip, including Infogrames, which has a strong franchise focus but is saddled with considerable debt. It's now believed that Sega is looking for smaller targets.

Dare to be digital
Now in its third year, the annual Dare to be Digital competition organised by Scottish Enterprise Tayside, Dundee City Council and Abertay University, is set to welcome five students from the prestigious International Academy for Media Arts and Sciences in Japan. The students will spend ten weeks during the summer at Abertay competing with six Scottish teams to develop a concept for a games product, with the winning team set to pick up a prize of £2,500. For more information about Abertay's undergraduate and post-graduate courses in Computer Games Technology, visit http://www.abertay-dundee.ac.uk/

Literary Festival Adds Ludic Lustre

PlayStation's 'Pilchard Teeth' fanzine introduce themes of play to add brio to Clerkenwell Literary Festival



Now in its third issue, 'Pilchard Teeth' is put together by 'The Idler' editorial team

Anyone fortunate enough to be passing through Clerkenwell's Tardis Studios on Tuesday July 16 would have no doubt felt lucky to catch a glimpse of **Edge** debating the thorny question of whether videogames boast more narrative sophistication than crisps and bar snacks. But that was just the start of a particularly videogame-centric Clerkenwell Literary Festival, and far from the only highlight. This year's event, which took place from July 16-21, was organised by 'The Idler' and its Playstation2-sponsored fanzine, 'Pilchard Teeth', giving the event a ludic lustre to complement its annual intellectual aspirations.

According to **Tom Hodgkinson** from 'The Idler', the overall event proved popular, and attendances showed an increase compared to last year's event. Certainly **Edge** has first-hand experience of the scholarly success of the festival, having participated in the aforementioned debate, 'Can Videogames Tell Stories', which saw Dave Green, of news website NTK, attempting to argue that games have as much narrative potential as a bag of nuts. Nevertheless, he was firmly put in his place by Hogshead Publishing's James Wallis, who pointed to the embryonic nature of the form, and indeed **Edge** itself, which wielded literary references with aplomb, and highlighted the diversity of the medium.



Edge columnist Steven Poole also participated, alongside Blur's Alex James and no less a luminary than Johnny Ball, contributing to a discussion called 'Play Time'. Though by all accounts, having come to the conclusion that play is, in fact, important, this session devolved after members of the audience started demanding that everyone start playing with each other. Other videogame related events included the the computer games pub quiz, which again proved popular.

The real strength of the event though was the diversity exhibited by the schedule. "My favourite event was probably the failure night," relates Hodgkinson. "We had Ernst Malmsten, author of 'Boo Hoo' and some really good performances, particularly from Arthur Smith who was compèring and made the whole thing so funny." And it's not often that literary festivals provide a night of 'Quadrophenia'-style tumult: "The 'Idler' night was also great fun, with Adam Buxton and John Cooper Clarke. It was absolutely rammed, very drunken, and it was attacked by a gang of drug-crazed youths who decided to knock the door down at midnight, because they were after someone who works for the Tardis. Fortunately the bouncers saw them off, but it was quite a frightening moment for a literary festival."

That's not the only way in which the Clerkenwell Literary Festival proved unique though. Indeed it's surprising that videogames should even be considered worthy of a literary festival, as Hodgkinson attests: "It's quite rare to include cultural minorities, but for the organisers of most literary festivals, it wouldn't even occur to them to have some kind of videogame debate."

But the event also highlights the sophistication of PlayStation2's stealth branding campaigns, demonstrating the merits of investing in something like 'Pilchard Teeth', which is distributed in bars and independent bookstores and record shops. Now in its third issue, Hodgkinson hasn't yet decided whether to produce any more, or whether to organise similar videogame/play-themed events. But in case there are any more issues, keep an eye on www.pilchardteeth.co.uk for more info.

But is it (narrative) art? **Edge** exercises debating skills with (from right to left), Stephen Armstrong, Dave Green and James Wallis over this thorny question



Photography: **Yoram Grahame**



Mario gets off to muted launch

Sales figures belie the deserted Tokyo streets that greeted the most eagerly anticipated software release for six years

Given the long wait for the latest instalment in the adventures of Miyamoto's paradigmatic plumber, the streets of Tokyo were strangely empty for a launch that was greeted in a rather subdued fashion. In the face of an astonishing absence of the Akihabara queues that normally greet major software releases, it's even alleged that Nintendo went so far as to ask some stores to delay their opening in order to build up queues for photo opportunities.

While the lack of opening day hype reflected Nintendo's own reluctance to promote the title, there were also some concerns voiced about the game's camera controls, and the decision to use English language voice acting – alienating the perceived audience of schoolchildren, and suggesting that Nintendo's current focus remains resolutely US-centric.

In spite of this apparent lack of interest from the Japanese public, sales of the game were considerable. Of the 400,000 units shipped at launch, 240,000 units were sold on the day of launch, with this figure increasing to 335,000 by the end of the weekend, making some headway towards the million units that Nintendo hopes to sell before the end of the year. But while these figures are reasonably impressive, it's a sign of the times that a character which once eclipsed Mickey Mouse in the hearts and minds of US schoolkids should be outperformed by *Warcraft III*, which sold a million units worldwide in just 20 days. It will therefore be interesting to see how successful Mario's reconquest of America will be.







Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Neverwinter Nights	PC	Infogrames	BioWare	9
Lost Kingdoms	GC	Activision	From Software	8
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne	PC	Take 2	Triumph Studios	7
Castlevania: White Night Concerto	GBA	Konami	In-house	7
Zettai Zetsumei Toshi	PS2	Irem	InterOne Inc	7
Barbarian	PS2/Xbox/GC	Titus	Saffire	6
Freekstyle	PS2/GC	Electronic Arts	In-house	6
GT Concept 2002 Tokyo-Geneva	PS2	SCEE	Polyphony Digital	6
Otostaz	PS2	SCEI	In-house	6
Pinball of the Dead	GBA	THQ	Wow Entertainment	6
GT Advance 2: Rally Racing	GBA	THQ	MTO	5
Hunter: The Reckoning	Xbox	Interplay	High Voltage	4
King of Fighters EX	GBA	Big Ben Interactive	Sammy	4
Prisoner of War	PS2/PC/Xbox	Codemasters	Wide Games	4
Tour de France	PS2/Xbox	Konami	In-house	4



Neverwinter Nights



Lost Kingdoms



Age of Wonders II



Zettai Zetsumei Toshi

CUTTINGS



Experience the PlayStation

As Sony reaches sales of 10 million PlayStation2 units in Japan, the line up for the PlayStation branded consumer show at this year's ECTS has now been confirmed. The show will be held from August 29-31 at London's Earl's Court Exhibition Centre, and will feature a raft of thirdparty publishers, including Namco, Square Soft, Activision, Capcom, Eidos, Electronic Arts and Konami, to the accompaniment of live music and performances by top skateboarders, BMXers and breakdancers. Tickets will be priced at £8 each (plus £1 booking fee) and can be booked by calling 0870 739 8700. More information can be found at PlayStation's official website, www.uk.playstation.com

Nintendo pushes Cube

In the absence this year of the company's annual Spaceworld event, Nintendo has been conducting a series of smaller promotional events to highlight the desirability of the GameCube. From the end of July, the GameCube has been promoted in conjunction with Toys 'R' Us across Japan, featuring playable versions of the forthcoming *Legend of Zelda* and *Mario Party 4*, and breaking with tradition, the company has produced demo discs to make available for free in Japanese retail stores. Closer to home, the company has announced a UK £1 million marketing push for the GBA during the summer.

Figures suggest booming market

The latest press release to reach **Edge** from ELSPA suggests that the UK videogame software market is booming. Recently released sales figures, sourced by Chart-Track, show that spending over the first half of this year increased by 13% compared to last year. Declining unit sales point to a decrease in the sales of budget software. Allied to the fact that spending on console software increased by 22%, these figures suggest that the industry is currently reaching a peak – confirming the impression given by the profusion of licenses and sequels on display at this year's E3.

www.arm.com

ARMing the future

The future is 3D gaming, even on low power handheld devices, says embedded chip designer ARM

It took six years from the time ARM started the initial chip design until Game Boy Advance finally hit the shelves. According to **Noel Hurley**, the company's segment manager for consumer entertainment, it's a common timeframe for a complex piece of consumer electronics. Although the wait in this case wasn't helped by the fact the finished blueprints sat in a safe at Nintendo while the company waited for the Pokémon/Game Boy cashcow to die down.

More than just an interesting tale however, this throws up two interesting corollaries. One is that for all the plaudits it's gained, the GBA launched relatively underpowered. "The ARM7 core used runs at 16MHz while a Compaq iPAQ and even some mobile phones now run at 200MHz," Hurley points out, explaining this demonstrates what can be done when a processor's power is focused on gaming.

The other corollary of the GBA's gestation period is that because of the nature of the business, it takes a long time for ARM's products to feed into the marketplace. One of the UK's success stories of the 90s, ARM is a world-leader at designing the 16 and 32bit embedded RISC processors used in low powered devices such as handheld computers, digital cameras and other devices. An intellectual property (IP)-based business, ARM designs chips and then sells them on to companies who actually make them.

"It takes about six months for us to produce a product specification and then six to 12 months to sell that to the semi-conductor companies," says Hurley. "They need to take our IP and turn it into a chip, which takes another 12 months." There's another six to 12 months for the OEMs to design and fab the motherboard. Only then can anyone think about releasing a product.

But if that's the bad news, the good news is ARM's five-year plan predicts gaming will be a major driving force for handheld technology. "The mobile phone people are hot for 3D. They see games as a big driver for 3G networks," reckons Hurley.

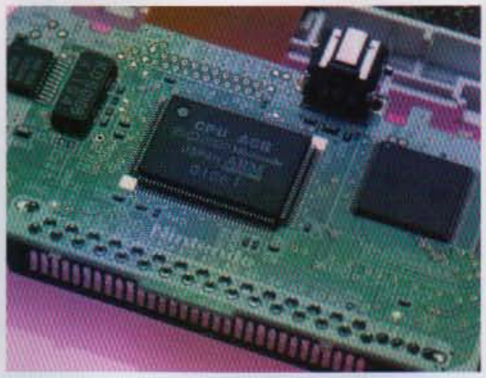
With this in mind, ARM's big sell for the future is System On Chip (SoC) technology, which combines the functionality of its CPUs with dedicated 3D graphics hardware. Don't expect an nVidia-style brute force approach though.

"Bandwidth is a big issue in the embedded chip space," Hurley points out. "3D graphics has traditionally eaten every transistor thrown at it, but there's no way we can do that. And we want as little activity as possible on the bus as that burns power." The size of the graphics hardware has to be tiny too. The resulting design integrates Imagination Technologies' tile-based rendering PowerVR MBX graphics core. Available in two options, MBX and MBX Lite, it only adds three square millimetres of silicon to the 50-odd square millimetres of a typical ARM core.

Perhaps more important is the fact that running a game in 320 x 240 pixels using full-screen anti-aliasing takes about 60mW of power, on top of the 30mW needed to run an ARM core. "That's well within our power budget," says Hurley. Using Superscape's i3D engine (see boxout), the result is a high-level of 3D sophistication. "We could have used smaller 3D renderers," says Hurley of the i3D engine. "But we wanted to maintain the featureset at the level of DirectX 7 or 8-class games so developers don't have to spend ages ripping up their code to get it to work."



As well as Nintendo's GBA, ARM chips are also used in the majority of mobile phones as well as being in a range of other devices from PDAs to digital cameras, modems, routers and calculators



Building on the core

As well as integrating MBX hardware into its processors, ARM offers a software-rendering solution to customers. "You won't see products using MBX hardware until 2004/5," Hurley says. In the meantime, ARM has an agreement with UK-Java platform specialist Superscape to use its Swerve technology to fill the gap. This sees its Swerve Client Lite software rasteriser providing entry-level 3D performance, as well as the integration of the Swerve i3D engine and proprietary model generation technology with the MBX-class hardware.

"Superscape's core IP is its model generation technology," says Hurley. "Effectively this means you can take a 3D model and define it in a tiny amount of memory so download speeds are vastly reduced." For example, while it takes about 16 minutes to download the 9MB *Quake* executable for the PocketPC, Superscape claims it can define a *Quake*-equivalent game in a download size of a mere 50K. In order to get games to work on the i3D engine, developers must use Swerve's proprietary tools, which plug into 3ds max, converting 3D models into the correct format for the technology.

www.kaydara.com

Forward Motion

Kaydara's new MotionBuilder3D character animation package can do a lot more than just deal with motion capture

Well-known amongst the motion capture fraternity, Kaydara hardly ranks alongside high profile companies such as Discreet and Alias|Wavefront in the radar of most artists. The character animation tool specialist is hoping that the latest release of its software package will change this however. Previously called FiLMBOX, version 4 of the product has been renamed under the more transparent MotionBuilder moniker.

"MotionBuilder should be complimentary to Maya and Max. Renaming it will help overcome peoples' prejudices about FiLMBOX being a motion capture-only package," explains Kaydara president **Michel Besner**.

Although originally designed to allow animators to clean up and attach motion capture data to their models, the featureset of MotionBuilder has seen its usefulness extended in the animation pipeline. One reason is that the package can handle realtime data; this being a preresquite for motion capture. This makes MotionBuilder a more flexible package in which to demo animations compared to the majority of packages, in which artists must load models into a game engine or other previewers. As well as dealing with motion capture data, animators can use MotionBuilder to add keyframe animations and inverse kinematic motion to their characters, providing them with plenty of flexibility.

Another reason for MotionBuilder's growing usefulness is Kaydara's FBX file format. Because motion capture data needs to be exported into a huge array of different software packages, the format has become the *de facto* standard for 3D datasets, as well as being able to handle 2D data, video and sound. Kaydara has recently released a FBX player within Apple's QuickTime 6 player, which enables any 3D dataset to be viewed via an interactive 3D camera. An SDK for FBX allows developers to write their own importers and exporters as well.

Version 4.0 also sees improvements to the MotionBuilder interface, which now uses an intuitive drag-and-drop approach. Other features include automatic character rigging, facial animation and lip-sync tools.

Running on Windows XP, Linux and Mac OSX, the package costs $3,500 (£2,234), the same as a yearly license for the FBX SDK. According to Besner, Kaydara is also considering the release of a sub-$1,000 (£638) product based on the MotionBuilder core in 2003.



Driving *The Getaway*

One example of the flexibility of MotionBuilder and the FBX file format was demonstrated during Sony's motion capture shot for *The Getaway*. Character models and environments generated in Maya were imported into MotionBuilder and then fed the live motion capture data from actors who were acting the game's cut-scenes. These could then be previewed in realtime in-game to check the actors' positioning and motions were correct. For example, it was possible to see if characters were walking through walls rather than doorways. The motion capture scenes could then be easily and quickly cleared which meant that no scenes had to be reshot, saving both time and money.

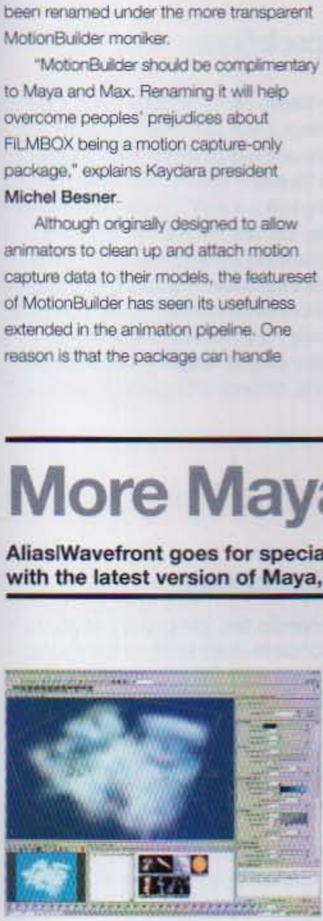


Superscape's Swerve technology can run on ARM's cores to provide 3D rasterising in software. Its i3D engine can also be used in conjunction with Imagination Technologies' MBX

www.aliaswavefront.com

More Maya

Alias|Wavefront goes for special shader effects with the latest version of Maya, Maya 4.5



Special effects are becoming the lifeblood of the games industry, just as they have come to dominate the movies. New shaders effects could potentially revolutionise the visual quality of games; something both Microsoft and nVidia are enabling with their new graphics programming languages. And now Alias|Wavefront, developer of Maya is also getting in on the act. The seventh major release of the 3D graphics technology sees the top-end Unlimited version of Maya, Maya Unlimited 4.5 featuring two major new technologies.

Fluid Effects provides tools to allow users to create complex atmospheric, viscous liquid, pyrotechnics and space effects in an integrated manner. According to Bob Bennett, Alias|Wavefront's general manage, this will provide developers with new opportunities. "The release contains numerous enhancements that will give our users the ability to create visual effects and animations that were traditionally almost impossible to achieve, and that's not counting the astounding integrated Fluid Effects," he says.

The types of effects that will become simpler to create will include combinational effects such as cigarette smoke which mixes volumetric fog with small particles, as well as thick fluids, which act partly as liquids and partly as solids. Other effects Alias points to include fiery explosions, nuclear blasts and comets.

The other major breakthrough in Maya 4.5 is the Ocean Shader, which, unsurprisingly, will allow modelling of open water effects such as waves and foam. In addition, because it is integrated with the rest of Maya, objects will float naturally on the surface and react in a physically modelled manner to the water's motion.

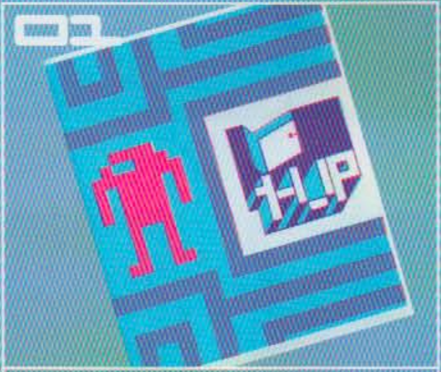
Improvements have also been made to the polygon modelling tools and conversion between higher order surfaces is now promised. This means, for example, that artists will be able to switch models from subdivisional surfaces to NURBS and back again. Game developers should be keen to play with the added features of Maya's API, which have been beefed up particular respect to writing pixel and vertex shaders.





Redesigned and renamed, *MotionBuilder* should become a useful tool for all kinds of animators

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Issue one, with sexy silkscreened cover, sold out, but issue two – in 3D, apparently – is on sale now





John Pham provided this strip. He's also the editor's boyfriend. Would-be Edge contributors take note



One of Edge's mysterious crates, and two of Edge's rather inexplicable door stops. Thanks, Nintendo





A bright red videogame sweatshirt – perfect festival wear. You'll keep warm, and no-one'll go near you

01 Extra Life

US: Handmade and (paradoxically, given its subject) lavishly lo-fi, '1UP' is an ink 'n' paper fanzine styled around videogame culture. It's the creation of Raina Lee, a fanzine veteran and freelance writer from California who previously worked as a games publicist, and includes essays like 'How *Tetris* Saved My Life', 'Pac Mom', and, improbably, a feminist reading of *Um Jammer Lammy*. **Kathleen Hanna** of 'Le Tigre' called it "that beautiful 'zine about videogames," which should be recommendation enough for any Riot Grrls or their meek, whimsical boyfriends; other **Edge** readers may just wish to up their intake of smart, passionate, independent writing. '1UP' costs $4, and issue #2 should be out now. More details at http://www.1up-zine.com

02 Crate Expectations

UK: So **Edge** is sitting in **Edge**'s office – as **Edge** is paid to do throughout the working week, obviously – cheerfully playing games, fielding phonecalls, and writing the next issue of **Edge**. Multitasking is one of the benefits of being a multi-limbed entity; conversely, finding clothing to fit is a bitch. The two heavy wooden crates arrive about midday, stamped 'Produce of Japan' and nailed firmly shut. That means they're near-impossible to break into, but some many-armed improvised crowbar-ing later, **Edge** is the proud owner of several Nintendo-branded t-shirts, a couple of sweatshirts, and two *Donkey Kong* doorstops. To what end? Since they won't be publicly available, **Edge** has no idea, but is impressed that Cake Media, Nintendo's PR company, correctly guessed **Edge**'s size.

Soundbytes

"guess what nintendo are joing with sega to make a super console Just look at the facts .At e3 the saga boss was on stage with shiggy playing zelda .thay hvee both sead that thay are making no more sytems even though nintendo are doing well .sonic is going to apear in the new mario cart"
Edge's Internet informant details the future of electronic entertainment in an unsolicited email. Which he sends to all of **Edge**. Several times.

"You can move down the hill. This you do using your Game Boy technique."
Bid-up.tv's Peter Simon tries to sell you a copy of the GBA version of *Sean Palmer's Pro Snowboarding*

"Play the X-Fire SMS mobile phone game and you could win a Nintendo X-Box"
channel4.com offer an interesting prize for one of their competitions. Just think of the eBay value...

"It is apparently quite easy to do, using the left, and the right, and the... Game Boy Advanced technique."
Peter Simon moves on to *"Martin Hoffman's Pro Mix"*

Silver Surfers

UK: Targeted at people 'who don't need to check their bank balance,' PDA accessory company, Proporta, is offering specially made silver cases for all leading handhelds. Although the cases will set you back around £1000 they are handmade by a silversmiths in Hove and can be personalised to the customer's requirements. Proporta is so keen to promote the cases that they will even escort customers to the silversmiths so they can be 'involved in the process'. Silver styluses at around £75 can also be purchased. Contact Hove based Proporta on http://www.proporta.com for more.

Spies from the Eastern Block

UK: Lego purists will be outraged by the toy company's latest attempt to keep up with the times. Marrying the espionage hokum of 'Spy Kids' with modern tech, Spybotics are not only built with the aid of a PC tutorial but can be programmed to undergo several missions around a typical teenager's bedroom. Although this requires an assortment of obstacles, including books, cricket bats and a desk lamp (to power up the energy jewels, naturally) the Spybotic creatures are robust and offer extensive fun for those with a big imagination and a good PC. Whether your bedroom floor will be tidy enough to allow for such navigation is a different matter altogether. Spybotics are out in August and will retail for £60.

Double Vision

Australia: Super smart, and super sexy, Peter Boot's Multi-Player Simultaneous Viewing System uses a PC to double stretch the top and bottom halves of split-screen games to full resolution, and then displays each doubled-up image on alternate refreshes. Adventurous players wear LCD glasses that block out every other frame, so, in theory at least, each sees their own half running on the TV. In other words, providing you can cope with a limited framerate and impaired resolution, this might be the thing to finally offer full-screen *GoldenEye* multiplayer. But to be honest, who cares if it actually works? The hip-to-the-max silver shades should be enough to convince po-faced naysayers that, yes, gaming is definitely super cool again. More info from http://homepages.ihug.com.au/~peter.boot/

Data Stream

Percentage of readers who agree with the statement "I would prefer games reviews in **Edge** not to have a score attached": **13**
Percentage who disagree: **85**
Percentage who don't know: **2**
Average time spent playing games per week: **11 hours 35 minutes**
Average time spent reading each issue of **Edge**: **2 hours 40 minutes**
Average number of times issue is picked up: **9.6**
Average age of **Edge** readership: **25 years 1 month**
Percentage of male readers: **99**
Percentage of margin for error: **2**
Percentage of readers who recycle **Edge**: **4**
Best suggestion for **Edge** supplement: **"Edge Heavyweight Cheats"**
Best suggestion for **Edge** free gift: **"Nice bottle of wine"**



Ah, sweet silver. But Edge won't consider buying one until they do a platinum range at half price





Look, it's a videogame featuring Lego. And this one isn't by Binary Asylum, either. Edge thinks, anyway



Ah, Lego and robots. It's a marriage made in marketing heaven, at least as far as Out There goes





If you're prepared to go to the trouble of setting up something as aesthetically irritating as this...



...and suffer the life-threatening indignity of wearing a pair of liquid crystal glasses just like these...



...then you can turn one of *those* into one of *those*. Who needs LANs or online gaming anymore?



Kick, punch: it's all in your mind. Design your very own beat 'em up with *3D Kakuto Tsukuru 2*



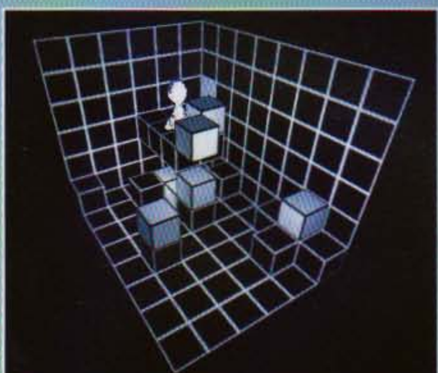
Your creation can be checked in realtime at any time. The backgrounds are chosen from a list



Nao Noa generates levels from web pages, like this. Now, you might see it as a messy squiggle...



...but your super-smart PC interprets it like this. Neat. Finally, a decent use for the **Edge** website



You push the crates, and you get to the door. It's a very familiar concept, but beautifully rendered.



Anyone else with an interesting homebrew project? Do tell: **Edge** wants *Torvill & Dean Pro Ice Skater*





They're skateboards, but with decks inspired by videogames. Not sure what videogames, though

06 Bits of fury

Japan: Don't like *DoA3*, *VF4* or *T4*? Get *3D Kakuto Tsukuru 2* instead. An(other) elaborate Enterbrain production, this PS2 beat 'em up maker allows you to select the graphical style for characters, create your own moves (although 600-odd are already included) and edit combos for 60fps twoplayer action.

07 D.I.Y. Corner

UK/Sweden: Following the success of **E**113's Sticky Balls (developed with Blitz3D, not, as previously stated, with DarkBasic) more **Edge** readers have revealed their pet projects. Particularly noteworthy is *Nao Noa*, the product of three Dutch Design students who set out to produce an original game in under three weeks. The end result, which generates levels from the contents of Web pages, can be downloaded from http://whatisnaonoa.hku.nl, although it's as frustrating as it is smart, and requires a reasonably high-spec PC. Somewhat less demanding is *Altitude* by Miremare. "It looks like *Knightlore*, but plays like *Sokoban/Boxworld*," explains the shareware developer, and, unsurprisingly, it's right: it's a simple idea, and exceptionally well executed. The full version, with 80 levels and a level editor, costs $10; curious boxers can download the shareware version for free from http://www.miremare.com. Other projects currently in production by industrious **Edge** readers include an online *Bomberman* clone (http://www.smilingkenshi.net/murofegde/) and the marvellously self-explanatory *Super Hamster Ball* (http://www.superhamsterball.com).

08 Edge is really cool

UK: Some attempts to get into Out There are more desperate than others, like the hard disk company who pitched its product as perfect for inclusion thus: "Well, you can put games on them." Maybe it's unfair of **Edge** to accuse Phat Trak of trying it on to quite that extent – after all, its new line of skateboards does feature the talents of "a top computer games house" who have "taken time out from the Microsoft Xbox project to design a range of special graphics". And, if nothing else, skate culture editorial proves **Edge** is down with the kidz. Now, where's that [generic nu-metal] album? Ah, yes. \m/ rock.

Continue

Mario's return
It's just like '96. Boink. Whoooosh. Bling. Bling. Aieeeee!
Xbox homebrew development
Finally, a multiplayer alternative to *Halo*: *Pong*
Bath Gamestation's customer service
Seemed genuinely eager to help **Edge** save money. Odd

Quit

Invisible walls
Oh, Shigeru, how could you?
Edge's health
Hayfever, gastric flu, painkillers, and Lupin's overworked
Dell's customer service
Purchasing a PC's almost as hard as getting it to run

09 Minority Report

While it's not part of the **Edge** philosophy to reward shameless tie-ins, the quality of this Philip K Dick collection forces an exception. Re-issued on the back of the Spielberg/Cruise vehicle, 'Minority Report' (the book) consists of nine short stories demonstrating the scope of Dick's vision.

Written quickly, usually under the influence of cheap speed, his stories' bare-boned pace more than makes up for their lack of polish. It's a style that's made Dick beloved of movie writers. As well as 'Minority Report'; 'Total Recall', 'The Impostor' and 'Screamers' are also based on stories in this collection. Interestingly all feature protagonists having to think their way out of confused and dangerous situations. It almost goes without saying, for example, that the Cruise character in 'Minority Report', Anderton, is a chubby man in the midst of a retirement crisis. Dick's brand of science fiction always being more about the identity of the working man than the role of whizzbang technology.

Some of the other stories, such as 'Oh, to Be a Blobel!' and 'Faith of our Fathers', have dated though. In contrast to the predictive quality of Arthur C Clarke, Dick too often reverts to stock archetypes; the amoeba-like Blobels or the thought-police of 1984. But even in these situations he manages to write his way to virgin territory. And with a nod to Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis', 'The Electric Ant' is worth the price of the book alone.

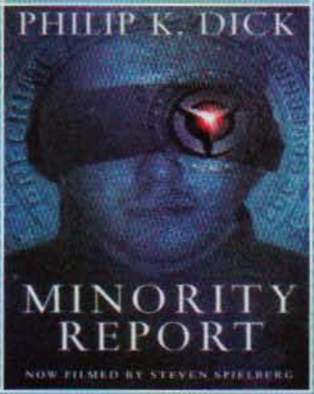
10 Rethinking Women + Cyberculture

CyberFeminism, like games for girls, seems to be one of the perennially intractable problems of the digital age. Sure, everyone can agree on a few pointers: Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Sadie Plant and Lara Croft being the three popular ones. However, little progress seems to have been made in terms of what an acceptable female role model should be. Does a lesbian-reskinning of the rebel-without-a-cause hacker work? What about Trinity from The Matrix? How about the heretical showstopper: Can women even write decent sci-fi?

'Reload' tackles this final point, at least, head on. Its approach of interspersing academic papers with examples of feminist sci-fi is novel but works, if only to break up some of the drier discourses. It's also to the credit of the editors, Flanagan and Booth, that the fiction usually throws some light on the surrounding earned discussions.

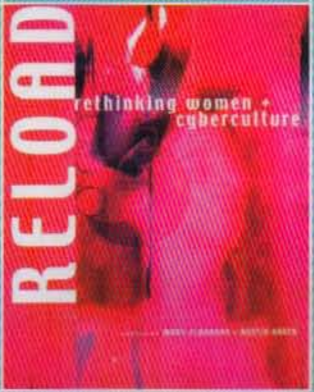
But on the fundamental question of finding a valid approach to cyberculture, the jury remains out. Most researchers seem locked into defining cyberculture through technology. Thus feminising it becomes a case of prettifying objects and devices – at its lowest level is akin to painting the VR headsets pink. There also plenty of discussion of the transcendence of the body – how the cyberpunk role of swapping flesh and blood for virtuality interacts with traditional feminism, obsessed as it is with physicality. Of course, the result is more questions than answers, but 'Reload' demonstrate progress can be made.

09



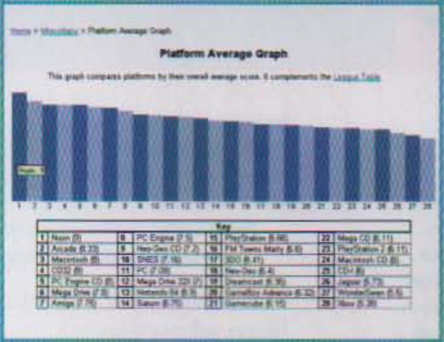
Author: **Philip K Dick**
Publisher: **Gollancz**
ISBN: **1 85798 738 1**

10



Author: **M Flanagan & A Booth (eds)**
Publisher: **MIT Press**
ISBN: **0 262 06227 5**

11



Site: **B3TA**
URL: **http://www.b3ta.com**

11 Website of the month

You're sat in the pub with your mates, and you're arguing about the greatest games system of all time. "It's the N64," one of them says. "No way! Dreamcast rules!" replies another. "I think you'll find that it's the PlayStation," says a third. The conversation's going to circle forever. What can you do? Simple. You use the power of maths and the unofficial **Edge** Review Database, which contains all the scores from issue zero to the present day cross-referenced with formats and issue numbers. Then you sort the systems by average score, and you find out the Nuon's the greatest games machine of all time. Indisputable evidence presented in neat tabular form, everyone's forced to agree, and the conversation returns to Hannah vs Myleene.

12 Advertainment

Japan: It begins the way every other Japanese GC advert does. A GC appears on the screen against a black background. A hand (in this case familiar) picks it up by the handle and reveals the GC logo. The screen then turns red and The Cap makes its entrance...



The camera moves slightly back, The Cap moves up and those blue eyes stare straight at you.



Then, GC in hand, our plumbing friend jets off into the air, high above the ground, and gets very...



...very close to the camera. But we've barely had the time to appreciate his iris when a blur flashes past.



It's Evil Water Mario! He steals Mario's aquapack and rather than seeing the plumber shatter both tibias...



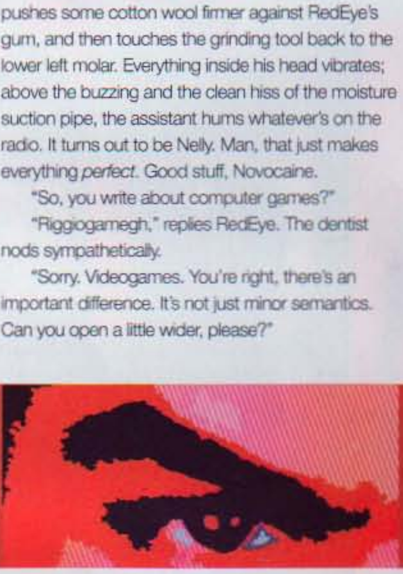
...we're treated to lovely sequences from the game.



Voiceover: "The water pump is going to be great. Fly – discover great new actions!"



"Welcome to the next generation of entertainment: *Super Mario Sunshine!*" Review on page 80.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Fear: a little pain never hurt anyone

Maybe it's the Novocaine – is that what it's called in the UK? Perhaps not; still, it's such a pretty word – but right now, frozen in the dentist's chair, RedEye's never been more in love. The dentist looks like an angel, her white light halo made from anglepoise medical lighting. She pushes some cotton wool firmer against RedEye's gum, and then touches the grinding tool back to the lower left molar. Everything inside his head vibrates; above the buzzing and the clean hiss of the moisture suction pipe, the assistant hums whatever's on the radio. It turns out to be Nelly. Man, that just makes everything *perfect*. Good stuff, Novocaine.

"So, you write about computer games?"

"Riggiogamegh," replies RedEye. The dentist nods sympathetically.

"Sorry. Videogames. You're right, there's an important difference. It's not just minor semantics. Can you open a little wider, please?"

RedEye tries.

"Okay. Good. So let me see if I've got this right." She takes the drill, switches it with another. "Computer games are solitary. People play them in their bedrooms. They sit with heads inches from screens, with eyes fixed to the monitor. Computer games absorb you, fully – they don't permit eye-to-eye contact. They don't promote social interaction. Or flirting, except online, with a keyboard and a girl who's probably a middle-aged man.

"Now, videogames..." The drill lingers, then starts to skip along with each syllable. "I'm thinking arcades, undone Adidas and pixel fury. Design-wise, they're retro-chic, simple logos, bright colours and sleek lines. In terms of image, videogames are show-off, pop-culture, trying to play you out as if your name is Sega. You want a purely semantic dissection? The word 'video' is sexier than the word 'computer'. Video says MTV, computer says IBM. You say videogames, and my head says sprites on skinnyfit t-shirts, quarters and cathodes and getting stoned with your mates playing *Mario Golf*. Right?"

"Yegth."

"You really shouldn't smoke, RedEye. It's bad for your teeth." The dentist gives a disapproving glance, and the drill fizzes deeper through something solid.

"'Orry. Ouugh! 'Orry!"

The pain makes Redeye flinch, and his tongue, fat and numb, fumbles across his mouth.

"Slip of the tongue. Heh."

"Egh?"

"Just thinking about semantics. Dental joke. Want to hear what I think about videogames?"

"Ogay."

"There's not enough pain."

RedEye tries to nonchalantly raise an eyebrow. But nonchalance in this situation is difficult to contrive, and he ends up looking like Roger Moore caught in headlights.

"An experience is defined by its low points and high points. This, for example," she twitches the drill deep into the calcareous fissure and RedEye spasms, "is the low point of today's dental experience. Well, at the moment, anyway. But that just makes the high point," the dentist kisses RedEye lightly on the forehead, "even better.

"So, how can we really enjoy the little victories in videogaming unless we've really suffered? Didn't the best moment in *Super Monkey Ball* come after hundreds of moments of last-life falling despair? But even that capitulates in the end, gives you infinite continues."

"Agsholukely," RedEye acknowledges, smoothly. "Still, loss can mean a lot of things. Semantics again." The dentist removes her hand from RedEye's mouth, and places her tools on the table. The suction pipe and cotton wool remain in place. She reaches to a shelf behind her, and picks up a coin.

"This is what it's all about. Games that make you crash and burn when you fail, games that put the fear of God into you"

"Heads or tails, RedEye?"

"Egh?"

"Heads or tails?"

"Tays."

"It's heads. Doesn't matter. Rubbish game. I mean, how could you have known? And did you really care either way? There was nothing riding on it. We could have kept flipping coins all afternoon and you'd have won eventually. So let's make it a little more interesting."

"Wurgh?"

"Your tooth. Now, it's hurting you, and it's boring me. So we can keep it or extract it. To be honest, I'm not sure it's worth all the effort of treating it, but I suspect you're going to want it saved. Quicker to remove it, though. I can see a case either way. Heads or Tails?"

"Urk."

"Go on."

"Uhm..."

"Oh, I know what you're thinking. There's no skill, it's a game of chance, not like a videogame at all. But here's the thing, RedEye." She flips the coin; it spins, twists, and RedEye hears it hit the floor. "Now, I can see the coin. I know if it's heads or tails. And if you know as much about women as you'd like to think, you'll be able to see from my expression exactly which it is." She grins. "So which is it?"

"Ughm." It's tails. No, it's heads. No, her smile says tails. Tails. "Tays ahain."

She giggles. "Oops."

"Wugh? Wash ih hegs?"

"Y'see, this is what it's all about. Games that make you crash and burn when you fail, games that put the fear of God into you."

"Ig wash hegs, washn't ih? Shig! Fug!"

"Games like *Tekki*, that trash your savegame when you mess up. Did you ever play *NetHack*? Not a videogame that one, very much a computer game – nerdy, absorbing, ugly, solitary. But God, when you lost, you lost; your character died. And that just made the thrill of winning so much better."

The assistant removes the suction pipe and some bloody gauze from RedEye's cheek, and – oh God, it must have been tails – he lets out a sigh.

"All done," says the dentist. "Your tooth's going to be fine. It'll be a bit tender for a while, that's all. Brush around it. Try not to chew on that side."

RedEye's not really listening. He's just pleased he won't have a gap. Oh, and pleased he's still got it when it comes to playing games, and playing games with girls.

"By the way, it came up heads." RedEye looks down. The coin lies there, heads up. The girl in white grins. "Lucky I'm an angel, isn't it?" she says. RedEye nods. Novocaine numb, he makes to leave.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Competition: it's not the winning...



Competition is everywhere. For some reason it often attracts the adjective 'healthy'; it is thought to be the noble core of sport; it drives down prices in the economy. We are all happy competitors. In videogames, too, we often speak in competitive terms. Not just for those games which function solely to provide an arena in which we compete with other humans, but for singleplayer games where we interact with an inhuman system. Still we will often say, "I beat that level," or "I beat the game." The point of a game is supposedly to 'win', after all. But what does it mean to compete against inanimate digital structures?

During Wimbledon fortnight, I took a look at Namco's *Smash Court Pro Tournament*. It's no masterpiece, to be sure, no *Virtua Tennis 2*; but it did, with its simple controls and happy immediacy, remind me of halcyon days playing *Match Point* on the Spectrum, and there was a sadistic pleasure to be had from noting how precisely none of the licensed players appeared in the latter rounds of the real-life Wimbledon.

But playing against the computer opponents, as usual with sports and fighting games, turned out to be a curiously soulless experience, good only for practice in anticipation of the inevitable multiplayer. The usual complaint is that the AI players don't seem human, but why exactly is this? It seems that what characterises human play in any endeavour is inconsistency. During an evening of *Smash Court*, my friend Josh would play a brilliant volley to win one point and then dump both his serves into the net to lose the next one. I would whack a perfect backhand return down the line, and then on the next point I'll flail around making air-shots and miss an easy smash.

Sport, in other words, whether in the virtual world or the real one, is built on mistakes. Just ask David Seaman. If a team of 11 perfect footballers met a team of another 11 perfect footballers, the result would be an antiseptic stalemate with no goals. Brilliance can only exist in the context of errors. The same is true of chess, where the rule of thumb is that the guy who makes the next-to-last mistake – patzer or super-Grandmaster, it doesn't matter – wins the game.

It is difficult, however, to program a computer opponent in such a way that it makes mistakes in a convincing fashion. Errors made by a machine, because we know that it need make no errors at all, are likely just to seem forced and patronising. *Virtual Kasparov* on the Game Boy Advance is a case in point. The first 20 or so opponents all play fairly solid chess, right up until the apparently aleatorically chosen point when they bizarrely drop a piece or allow a trivial forcing tactic. Strong chess programs running on fast PCs won't do that, but their style of play is still notably 'computerish', and one feels as though one is playing the board rather than playing an opponent. Even in *Advance Wars*' singleplayer campaign one feels as though one is solving a dynamic puzzle rather than pitting one's wits against a contesting intelligence.

Perhaps the central, apparently paradoxical truth is that competition is a cooperative activity. Two creative minds vie and collaborate to produce a beautiful point in tennis, or a beautiful chess game, just as the apparent enmity of the opposing lawyers in court is supposed to constitute a higher, collaborative procedure to find the truth of the charges. In this way, singleplayer videogames are very rarely competitive. You don't remember your *Virtua Fighter 4* bouts against the computer, but those against your friends. It is enjoyable, for certain tarmac-heads, to win hundreds of cups against the computer opposition in *Gran Turismo 3*, but if you are in the habit of saving replays to memory card, they will probably be of human-vs-human races.

"Because computer opponents lack true creativity, they have mostly offered brute tests of physical skill against more or less overwhelming odds: an impoverished notion of competition"

Because computer opponents lack true creativity, they have mostly offered brute tests of physical skill against more or less overwhelming odds: an impoverished notion of competition. The scripted linearity that one still finds in games such as *Medal of Honor: Frontline* engenders a feeling that one is merely a lab-rat pressing switches in a cage, attempting to second-guess what the designer wants. But there are, increasingly, exceptions. The remarkable situational potentiality of *Halo*, for example, is a case in point in the action genre, where filmic combat scenarios can be created on the fly. But perhaps the most collaborative videogame form so far is the genre known as rhythm-action.

Dance Dance Revolution notoriously allows the player to add his own terpsichorean improvisations in between attending to the symbolic requirements floating down the screen, although this is still largely a performative game: solo play is usually practice to show off in front of friends or strangers, rather than an end in itself.

Frequency, however, offers an even more creative process. The player still has to hit the right symbols in order, but she is free to choose the order in which she brings in the various rhythmic and instrumental elements to each track, as well as being encouraged to improvise in the freestyle sections. And one might even say that the Remix mode is the game's spiritual core, since – much as in the Traveller mode of *Rez* – the requirement to gain a sufficient score is abandoned in favour of pure collaboration.

All this is not to say that there is never pleasure to be had in 'beating' a game, in overcoming a set of well-designed challenges. But the ever-increasing popularity of online gaming, as Sony and Microsoft gear up to launch their respective networks, might serve to emphasise the point that in many genres, a computer opponent just never will be as satisfying as a human one. We might hope, then, for more collaborative singleplayer experiences that allow us to journey with the digital system rather than just try to beat it. There is more to playing than just winning.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

How to harness creativity



This month I would like to change direction a little and, in addition to talking about the creation of video games, I would like us to consider the philosophy that lies behind the creation. What's important is your way of thinking, and your team's work towards that. What I would like to talk about only represents a fraction of the issue, but I would be very happy if some of you feel it fits with your thinking. I would like to start with the moment I come up with an idea.

The first problem is negative thinking. Normally, the standard procedure for any creator begins with an analysis of the market. "What would make a hit?" "What would be welcomed by users?" But it isn't very easy to find the right answers, and then the doubt starts. You start to think that the market isn't healthy and whatever you create won't sell. Or that people's tastes and interests are so unpredictable – that there is no real trend. You get negative, and you become unable to create, and in that situation no work is possible. So we go to the next step.

Get rid of any consideration for your environment and focus on *you*, on what you would like to do. You've started with only negative views. You need to stop them. You can do whatever you like. There are no rules. Relax, and then the ideas should emerge within you. Then comes the tricky part. You have to think why you've had these ideas. What are their inspirations? The answer to that should help you to broaden your outlook. You should be able to establish links with the market.

Interestingly, it is the antithesis of the current marketing approach. Normally game makers look for a market and find a game to fit – here we look for the game, and then broaden it to find an audience. If you decide to try 'niche marketing', aiming your game at a small section of the market with a good chance of persuading them to buy, well, that's one way. However, I don't believe you should concentrate on that. Or maybe you should try copying, but a faded idea has no future whatsoever.

Can you place a deadline for coming up with an idea? I want to be precise here: there can not be no such thing. Again: there can be no deadlines in the search for ideas! But there is a positive aspect to deadlines, too. I think that, as children, we are taught to need deadlines to prevent us from not doing anything. If you don't have a deadline, you delay your task for later. In my case, I think I have had good results by putting in a kind of limit, forcing some rules on myself. It may not be the same for you, but in my case it has a good impact. Or maybe I'm just lazy?

The last point I would like to introduce concerns memos. To get ideas, you need materials. I have to admit I place memos all over the place. Hey, that doesn't mean I write a lot of them, okay? But I place them everywhere. I have three places back at home (living room, my private room and the bedroom) and three others at my company (my desk, my office and the meeting room). Why so many places? Because I write everything in memos. Okay, fine, that means I do write a lot of them. But, at some point, I put them into properly written form. This is the most important aspect: my memos go into two groups: things I can use and others that I can't.

Once I have a big enough group I can use, I arrange them too, into groups of ideas that get along together very well. You try to create synergy between them. Moreover, among the ones that have been dropped because they didn't seem useful, it is possible that some can be blended together and revived into an interesting new idea, which could then be integrated with the useful ideas. The entire process is like a big puzzle game in which you match things together. You can keep them, and edit again at a given time later, with a new approach. While the time passes, some tastes fade, and others still offer a very strong feeling.

This filtering process lets you keep the very best elements from your ideas. It still relies on your imagination, but if you don't apply this edit process seriously you have nothing at the end. Imagine it as cooking. Ideas represent your ingredients. Eating them raw would not be wise. You need to cook them, mix them together, so they form a delicious meal. The cooking process is the edit process. I would encourage everybody to find a recipe, a procedure adapted to your own needs.

That's all for now. I'll return to my thoughts on game design again, but for a moment I would like to write about something totally different. Recently, I went to the World Hobby Fair at the Makuhari Messe exhibition centre. It was a beautiful day, and to be honest, I was very happy to go there. Anyway, while I was walking down a corridor links between areas of the show, I realised I recognised someone in front of me. It was Hideo Kojima of Konami. He was with his kids and he looked like any of the other fathers there. I said hello, and asked him why he was there.

"I came to the show so my kid could get something important about Rockman," he said to me in his Osaka accent. His son was holding a flyer of Rockman. Kojima turned to him.

"You don't salute?"

Prompted by his father, the child said "Hello" to me, very simply, and quickly returned his gaze to the Rockman flyer, clearly occupying his mind entirely.

"Your son doesn't play with *Metal Gear*?" I asked Kojima.

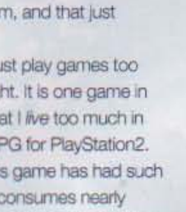
"Oh no no no!" he replied with a little laugh, looking at his son. "He's not interested in that!"

It was the first time I've seen such a gentle Kojima. This was not a serious videogame creator, showing off his fatherly image, but something greater. He was a happy father with his son. He was sharing his son's dreams, dreams filled with a creation made by a rival game maker. There was something so bright about that, something that makes you forget about everyday life, forget the world, the world in which you work to death. Shows are so good. Perhaps I've been making too many memos.

See you!

"You can do whatever you like. There are no rules. Relax, and then the ideas should emerge within you. Then comes the tricky part"

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4



TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Exhaustion: Kojima-san's been working too hard

These days I'm dead busy. I try to keep working and looking to the future, but I always have the feeling that I'm going backwards. I must admit that everything is beginning to get on top of me. My only hope is that this column will be published in time (just writing this sentence brings me out in a cold sweat). Why do I find myself in such a situation? In fact, I am well aware of the problem, and that just makes me feel worse.

Yes, the reason is that I just play games too much. No, that's not quite right. It is one game in particular. My admission is that I *live* too much in *Final Fantasy XI*, the online RPG for PlayStation2. I would like to explain why this game has had such an impact on me and why it consumes nearly every waking moment. But more importantly it has reminded me of why I play videogames in the first place. So, why am I spending so much time in this virtual world? It is difficult to explain precisely why, but perhaps if I go back a few years it will help.

My very first encounter with a videogame was when I was in my first year of elementary school. Now I'm 29 so that puts us back 23 years to 1979. Thinking about that time makes me laugh, but I can still remember it very well. It was a significant time in my game life. You have probably not even heard of the machine in question: it was Epoch's Cassette Vision Jr. The console was ¥5,000 and so was the game. Back then, this was high class stuff. The game I used to play was *Kikori No Yosaku* (literally, *The Man who Cuts the Trees in the Mountain*). Onscreen, there were two trees and, moving your character, your task was simply to cut them down. You had to avoid traps such as birds' droppings and wild boars rushing at you, but to do this you could jump. I also remember it was even too early to call the visual representation dot graphics. I mean this was just a group of squares you were moving onscreen.

Even so, I was very focused on that game. You pressed a button and the character reacted in realtime. This was incredible back then. Nowadays, this seems a very basic thing, but at that time it was so much fun and I just couldn't stop playing the game. For me, it was like the cartoons on TV and I couldn't stop watching them either. Linking the console to the TV was like transforming the TV set into a magic box. I really thought that. Of course, at that time nobody would use words such as 'interactive'. I really remember this experience as my first contact, the first 'shock' with videogames.

When I started high school, (in Japan this happens when you are 16), it is strange but I stopped playing videogames altogether. Music, fashion and girls were the centre of my new life. Why would I want to play games when there were so many other distractions? But in fact, now I realise that there was something else lacking in games. In *Kikori No Yosaku* pressing a button made a character move. But the shock I experienced when I was a child was fading and technology was growing up very fast. This gap between the technology and me was certainly the reason. Games were something for kids or a way to pass a moment, a way to enjoy your free time. Free time? By this I mean, if you arrive few minutes earlier at a rendezvous, then you have a few moments to spare. For three or four years I was thinking like this. Looking back now I can hardly believe it.

However, when I turned 20, I experienced for the second time the videogame shock. This was brought on when I stood in front of *Virtua Fighter*, which for me was the start of the 3D revolution. I was astonished. 2D characters were now moving in full 3D with polygons. The flat graphics and the flat environments I used to enjoy now had a new dimension which I can only describe using the word 'depth'. The 'Z' dimension! My notion that videogames were for kids or only to pass a bit of free time died at that moment. I was ashamed that I had held such a view for so many years. Please forgive me.

"In the real world I have become 'trash'. But thankfully, I am recovering and I'm getting back to my work, to the reality"

Yet the realisation of this revolution resulted in a videogame rebirth for me. How many hours did I spend on *Virtua Fighter*? Let's just say I made up for lost time. The visual impact was important, of course, but it was at this time that I also discovered the significance of the social side of gaming. Videogames could become a vital tool for mass communication and friendship. I'm speaking here about the arcade of course. People discovered a new form of communication in the arcades. It was something great, nearly new. It was a revelation and ironically I felt as if I had finally become an adult.

But wait, since the shock I experienced when I was six, and then 20 there has emerged a third one. It was when I played the beta version of *Final Fantasy XI* for the first time. The date was December 2001. Since then I have been hooked and now the final version of the game came out on May 16. Now we are at the end of July. Truth is, I have been living for the last six months in my adopted country, Vana'diel.

In the real world I have become 'trash'. But thankfully, I am recovering and I'm getting back to my work, to the reality. Yet I can't prevent this parallel world, Vana'diel, running in my head. First, pressing a button made the character move, second, 2D games become 3D and offered a completely new dimension. Well, *Final Fantasy XI*, this online RPG, has provided the new shock. Thinking about it I still have difficulty analysing it. It's like I'm in a very intense fog. This is hard because I really would like to share my feelings, my excitement with others. So it is true that I experienced a shock and it is also true that many other players are profoundly interested in this game. The reason for this shock or excitement is basically because it's my job. But this doesn't really explain it. It's frustrating, but I'm not alone in Japan. Many other people are playing the game for hours on end, but I don't think they understand why they are doing it either.

Writing this column, the fog is getting stronger and the writing process is getting slower. I feel as though the time is passing slower around me. Looking at the ceiling for some time, I decide to turn the PlayStation2 on. A blue sky with white clouds, the endless network world is lying in front of my eyes. This was my July Tokyo Game Life? Or perhaps it was my July Vana'diel Game Life? Which one I can't be sure.

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

The Getaway

Though digital downtown London has been reduced since early sightings, **Edge** remains interested in this – even with the lengthy mockney cutscenes.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Republic: The Revolution

The planned sociopolitical weaving is as intriguing as it is innovative. But will sales be affected now Elixir has missed last year's wave of communist cool?



(PC) Eidos

Galleon

Who's a pretty boy, then? Maybe so, but code **Edge** has seen moving on Xbox has been juddery to say the least. Hopefully things should improve by 2003.



(PC, GameCube, Xbox) Titus/Vivendi

EXO

Sightings of the squad-based mech-combat title have been rare since **E**98, though **Edge** would love to know how it's progressed in the intervening months.



(PlayStation2) Infogrames

Reward and punishment

The importance of good game structure

Checkpoints. Savepoints. Continues. Quicksaves. There are a number of ways to structure a videogame. Usually, the manner in which the player is shepherded through the game is dependent on its genre. Racing games = checkpoints, RPGs = savepoints, shoot 'em ups = continues. And nearly every lazily designed PC game, quicksaves. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Take checkpoints in racing games. Why do we still have to endure such strictures? What purpose do they actually serve? A checkpoint structure is perfectly logical for an arcade game, and for titles such as *Sega Rally* and *Daytona* it was the ideal method of keeping the majority of users from playing the game for no longer than three minutes. But why impose such restrictions on a game designed for a home console?

Present code suggests that Criterion's update to the excellent *Burnout* is to include checkpoints again. Some would argue that such a measure serves two purposes: first, to extend the longevity of the game and, second, to act as a spur to faster, more perilous driving. But the fun of *Burnout* comes from its core principle of fast driving and risk-taking anyway. You'd floor the accelerator whether there are checkpoints or not. Why? Because it's just more fun.

As for the longevity issue, a number of alternatives are available to prevent the player from completing the game without much of a challenge. Progression to the next stage could be made if a particular average lap time is achieved. Or a more radical structure would be to introduce a scoring system based on cars overtaken, near crashes avoided, highest speed achieved, etc. Thus encouraging risk but avoiding sending the player back to the start after only half a lap. Sure, if the player fails to meet the required score he still has to do the race over again, but at least there's no *coitus interruptus*.

It's always refreshing to see a game buck the trend in terms of its reward and punishment design. While *Jak and Daxter* was organised around the traditional hub/spoke structure, infinite lives gave the game a much friendlier aspect, encouraging extended play and never leaving the player irritated at having to restart huge sections again.

A home console gives us the opportunity to play games at our own pace and leisure. Time pressures and deadlines are bad enough at work. When alternatives can be found in videogames, surely they should be explored?













Burnout 2: Point of Impact

Predictably, extended play of pre-release code reveals another excellent adrenaline-filled ride









Some of the pile-ups caused by your initial collision can evolve into complete chaos as civilian traffic fails to brake in time – in-game replays accommodate this





Very little of *Burnout 2* was hanging together the first time **Edge** saw the game: the levels (those that were playable, that is) existed as singular entities; the soundtrack hadn't been properly implemented; *Burnout* graphical effects were being used as placeholder while work on the new ones was finalised – it was difficult to get a great sense of structure.

Realising the potential locked within each of the elements proved more straightforward, and since then a significant proportion of that promise has been burned on to DVD. Elements having to undergo tweaking remain of course, but certain aspects are already in place. In terms of structure, for instance, the game starts with Offense Driving 101 – six tests with three pass levels a la *GT* licences, which take newcomers through *B2*'s constituents (driving into oncoming traffic, near misses, drifting, boost, getting air) before collating these for a final, timed run.

Clearing this lifts the bonnet on the game's previously inaccessible inner workings: Championship, Time Attack, Single Race with the first introducing point-to-point and Face Off rounds to break up the routine. Of the new modes (see **E**112) **Edge** has only tried the Crash option which already exudes the addictive qualities of a robust mini-game, no doubt helped by the decision to stick to a challenge-based approach.

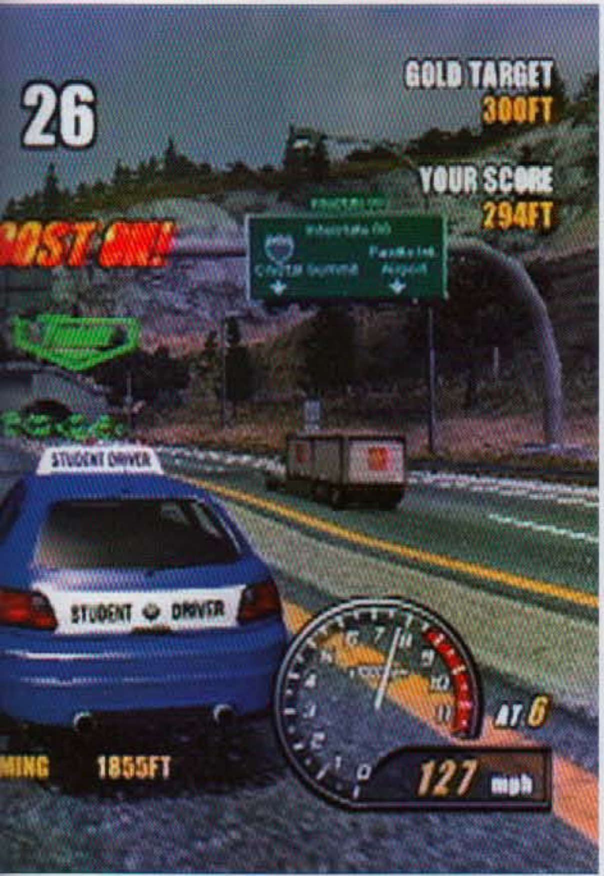
A more general, yet crucial contribution to the evolutionary work clearly evident comes from Criterion's audio department. While it's the improved polygonal engine from the visual/aural brotherly duo that is likely to receive all of the attention, the sound is the one that should be on the podium. This time the writing of the in-house soundtrack has shadowed the game's development and as such sounds more integrated than *Burnout*'s rushed offering. Melodies aside though, it's the team's solution to the boost process sound effects that has really transformed the experience: press R1 and the delicious nitro swish (think 'The Fast and the Furious') instantly kicks in, the engine noise dies down, drowned out by the music that assumes command of the aural controls – a simple approach but the resulting rush really intensifies the player's sense of engagement.

Although not finalised, track design is more adventurous than in *Burnout*, with a higher number of hotspots for players to negotiate. Generous drifting opportunities through some very fast curves is just one of the ways Criterion hopes to facilitate the filling of the boost meter so as to encourage gamers to spend most of their driving time with the nitro on. It ensures the quintessential *Burnout* experience (and most interesting

"Edge can't see players tiring of chain boosting their way around the gentle sweeps of the sprawling, busy Interstate 88"

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **Criterion**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **October**

Previously in **E**112









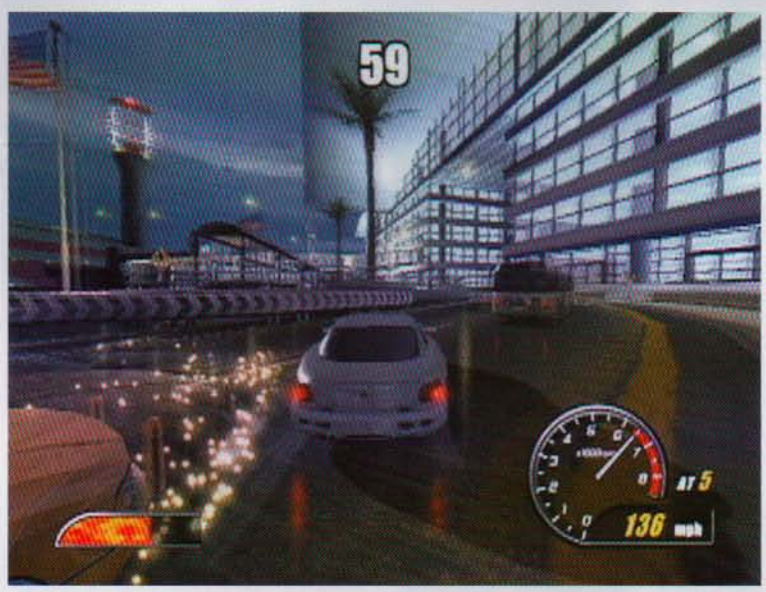




gameplay dynamic) occurs with greater frequency. It literally speeds up the pace of the game though **Edge** can't see players tiring of chain boosting their way around the gentle sweeps of the sprawling, busy Interstate 88 – it's real videogame rush stuff.

There is a discernible heightened level of involvement all round, in fact. As far as **Edge** can tell the handling dynamic remains unaltered (no bad thing) but the level of improvement in other areas combine to produce a gaming experience that even at this stage feels more complete, more confident than before.

Further tweaking is required, of course, but the game already offers moments of pure exhilaration. *Burnout*'s rougher edges have been smoothed over to create the kind of title that traditionally has only emerged out of a Japanese coin-op racing game specialist. Criterion's not quite there yet but it's a road the developer should be more than capable of negotiating.



Obviously still work in progress but the visual quality is a notable improvement over *Burnout*. The new focus on boosting is obvious – good players shouldn't spend much track time below the 140mph mark



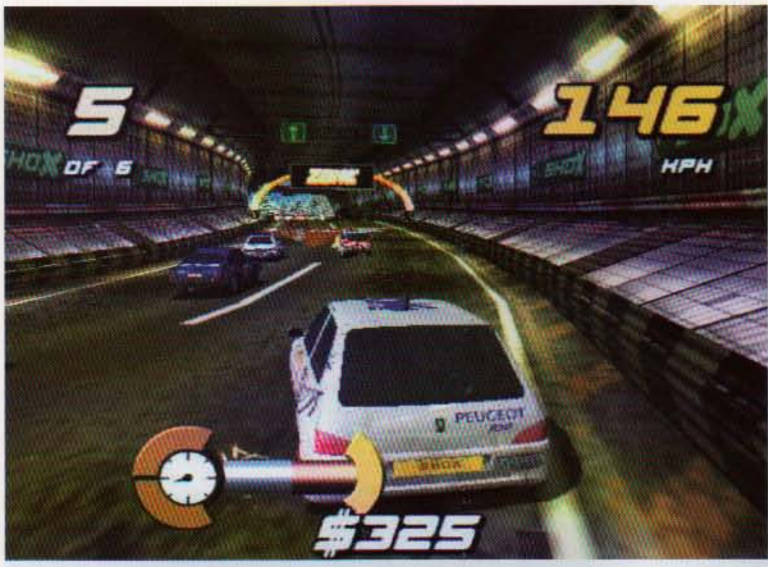
Human traffic

Another area to be enhanced is the way the CPU handles civilian vehicles. Cars, vans and lorries again swerve out of the way, flash their lights and are a lot more comfortable with horn usage. In *Burnout*, their reaction to your own klaxon was a little disappointing so hopefully the effect will be more noticeable this time. But at least the illusion of living breathing traffic is better achieved now. Also convincing are the crashes which display a more organic feel – although the chassis model would benefit from more distortion.

Shox

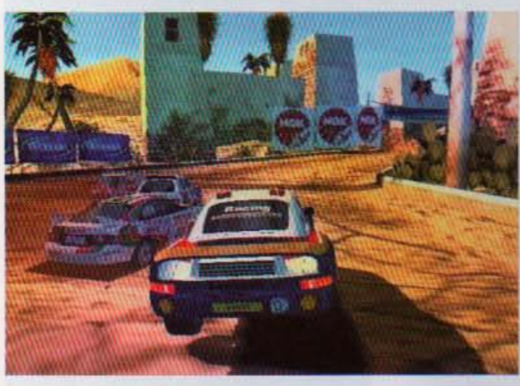
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Autumn**

EA hopes to recreate the shock of the new by going back to the arcade roots of rally driving games











Early preview code looks promising, though the handling could be a bit more hyper-kinetic to match the arcade ambitions clearly held by the developer







Although there are some similarities, *Shox* is more than just a lazy rally extrapolation of *SSX*, though there's every possibility that it might match the quality benchmark set by the original Big franchise

Going underground

"Multi-layered over the top audio elements add larger than life excitement as tires squeal, breaks grind, and engines rev," (sic) trumpets the marketing gumph. But in this case, the marketing gumph is backed up by the involvement of record label Global Underground. Better known for releasing DJ mix CDs by the likes of Sasha, Deep Dish and Darren Emerson, the label has worked closely with EA to develop a soundtrack that's both reasonably smart and, more importantly, is designed to retain its fidelity over the background hum of throbbing engines.

It would be all too easy to dismiss *Shox* as just another variation on an *SSX* theme, this time on four wheels. Particularly after *Freekstyle* (reviewed in **E**113) recently demonstrated EA's willingness to dust off the trick combo/speed boost dynamic and sprawling, expansive, courses that characterised the original, and so far best, product to have been released under the EA Sports Big label. Certainly, *Shox* retains the snaking tracks, the down-with-the-kids soundtrack and the hyperbolic handling of its predecessors. However, it 4also deserves to be seen as an attempt to re-inject a little bit of arcade-styled verve into a rally racing genre that, in recent years, has come to equate 'arcade handling' with an unedifying degree of unrealism.

It was this bid to reclaim the once rich arcade racing territory that prompted *Shox* to be released under the Big label, and one of the development team's mantras has been "every corner sideways." There's still a bit of polishing to be done to the handling to increase the sense of speed and exaggerated cornering, but it's already enjoyably over the top. Shox Zones also serve to up the arcade ante, requiring players to travel between two gantries in speed and style to earn either a gold, silver or bronze ranking. Indeed it's not just about coming first in multi-car races; coming first with panache will earn more points, which can be gambled in head-to-head races to unlock new vehicles.

Thankfully then, the unduly mean-spirited structure of *SSX* has been reworked, and though not all of the four championships are initially unlocked, each championship is planned to consist of around six tracks – providing plenty to play with from the very start. These, of course, cover icy conditions, desert tracks and jungle roads. And, as with any self-respecting racing game these days, the 24 vehicles on offer are all fully licensed from the likes of Audi, BMW, Toyota, Subaru, Lancia, Ford – and there's even a prerelease Porsche thrown in for good measure.

For those who are lucky enough to own a Multitap, a fourplayer splitscreen mode rounds out a package which, as you'd expect from Electronic Arts, is shaping up to boast deft production values throughout. **Edge** is certainly optimistic that spectacular crashes, big jumps, a vibrant, colour-rich aesthetic and extravagant handling will eclipse the disappointment of *Freekstyle*. However, there is still some work needed to maximise the sense of arcade abandon.

Battlefield 1942

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Digital Illusions**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **Summer**

Could this spectacular vehicular WWII really prove to be the most important shooter amongst the PC online crowds, or will it go the way of Vivendi's failed *Tribes 2*?

A certain type of PC gamer will remember the mediocre *Codename: Eagle*, a decent implementation of vehicles in the PC firstperson shooter genre, but also a disappointingly mediocre game. In 2002 the same team is returning to the limelight to lead EA's attack on the multiplayer end of the PC genre. The logical successor of *Codename: Eagle* is the explosive and lavishly good-looking shooter *Battlefield 1942*. Early showings wowed the PC press, but it's hardly guaranteed success. In such a busy sector, this is an ambitious title.

The game does feature *some* singleplayer elements but, as has become typical of multiplayer focused PC games, the tactical and teamplay skills of the AI is going to be relatively weak. Singleplayer modes might be hyped, but they're still just practice for the essential human versus human action on Internet or LAN gaming.

Battlefield 1942 offers a wealth of entertainment to those who have already invested time and money in online gaming. It's a team based wargame that offers a large selection of vehicles, from tanks and planes through to battleships, 35 in total. Players can play simply as different classes of infantry or opt to work as a unit to operate the larger and more complex vehicles. For those people who've yet to experience the organised chaos of online team gaming, the game will likely seem more than a little daunting.

What also remains to be seen is just how well the huge scale of the game will work with just 64 players. Other development teams have put forward similar ideas (notably *World War II Online*) that have seen potentially hundreds of players taking up arms and vehicles in online carnage. Recent large-scale efforts have found themselves floundering thanks to a lack of players.

Early playable beta code and demos of *Battlefield 1942* look promising, but it's going to be the raw time of tactical play amongst the PC hardcore that will determine the real worth of this ambitious title. It seems likely that those of us who hanker for immediate gratification will be wise to look elsewhere, especially if we live within Europe's limited gaming audience.















There's a big emphasis on the use of vehicles in *Battlefield 1942* but the game's class-based character system provides variety for small-arms combat for up to 64 lucky players

The Thing



Format: **PC, Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **Computer Artworks**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q3**
Previously in **E**102, **E**109

Twenty years on and man remains the warmest place to hide as Vivendi's alien-infested arctic draws closer





Variable levels of intra-squad trust remain a potentially powerful survival horror game mechanic, but **Edge** is concerned that *The Thing*'s level design may be too restrictive to do such an intriguing concept the justice it deserves

Playable PC preview code of the forthcoming videogame sequel to John Carpenter's 1982 celluloid opus recently allowed **Edge** a chance to glean a clearer picture of how the game's unique blend of survival horror and trust management will work in practice. And though it's still too early to tell quite how effective the AI system will work, it remains the game's most intriguing aspect – particularly given the possibility of squad members transforming into a malevolent fleshy monstrosity at the most inconvenient moments.

It's a shame then that level design seems, at this stage in development, quite prescriptive. Rote learning of sequences and solutions appears to be the order of the day here, while difficulty levels seem quite arbitrary – perhaps in an awkward attempt to amplify sensations of tension and fear.

A clumsy control interface is also undesirable. Nevertheless, a remarkable fidelity to the original movie locations, and viscerally satisfying implementation of the flamethrower do conspire to hark back to the psychologically taut magnificence of the film, and the nagging fear of overexposure to the arctic climate heighten the sense of panic and urgent unpredictability.

All well as good, still, if the rich potential of the license is to be met, there remains much polishing to be done.





As you'd expect from a developer with the track record of Computer Artworks, the game is graphically impressive – and indeed authentic

SpiralStone

Format: **GBA**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Gatehouse Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**
Previously in **E**113

Love RPGs, but tired of turn-based combat? Meet Gatehouse Games, a group of ex-Core coders who feel exactly the same







While the overhead viewpoint is typical of RPGs, *SpiralStone*'s world is more dark than comical. Spellcasting is certain to play a big part, as is the *Diablo*-style compulsion to locate rare items

Glimpsed in Alphas last month, *SpiralStone* is an RPG that departs from the turn-based archetype. "It seemed to us that many of the reasons for RPGs to be turn-based were historical," says Gatehouse Games director **Tom Scutt**. "Old consoles couldn't handle moving large numbers of enemies around, so the easy way was to not have them appear at all until you got to a combat screen. With efficient coding, the GBA is easily powerful enough to handle realtime." Hence *SpiralStone*'s dynamic battles, which can have up to 15 enemies on screen at once.

Mêlée combat is simple, but behind the single button *Gauntlet*-style attacks lies all the stat-math that RPG gamers have come to expect. Here, though, the calculations are hidden, and while expert players will want to match their style of play to their stats, RPG newcomers should find the game more welcoming than most. Another strong point is its non-linearity. One route through an infested dungeon might be simple slaughter, another to use stealth and invisibility potions, or to lure enemies into a trap, or to make them fight amongst themselves with confuse spells.



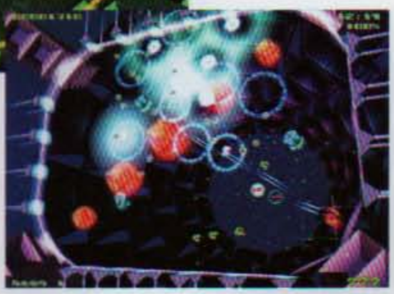
"We were inspired by *Diablo*, *Everquest* and *Zelda* and we think *SpiralStone* is a mixture of all of those with a lot of new stuff thrown in," says Scutt, causing three separate kinds of dungeon crawler to salivate.

Mutant Storm

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **PomPom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q3 2002**

PomPom, the two man development team responsible for *Space Tripper*, returns to prove that PC gaming isn't all click click click





Equal parts spectacular and frantic, *Mutant Storm* sticks to the clean polygons and thematic translucency that made *Space Tripper* so distinctive. Hopefully it'll be every bit as good

Out of nowhere came *Space Tripper*, searing twitch-gaming on a format whose reputation, in recent times, has been more cerebral than instinctive. Based on C64 classic blaster *Uridium*, it was the best shoot 'em up the PC had seen for years – utterly without pretension, but with perfect controls and as pure as snow. *Mutant Storm*, PomPom's follow-up sticks to the same oldskool design method, but this time the studio quotes its inspirations as *Robotron* and *Smash TV*. Most will know what that means: eight way movement, eight way fire, claustrophobia and panic.

Or just take PomPom's description. "Every new level gets harder, faster and ever more crowded with enemies. If it moves, shoot it. If it doesn't, shoot it. No planning, just instinct." Three methods of control are currently implemented. The dual sticks of *Robotron* can be mapped to pad or keyboard, FPS fans can control movement with the keyboard and direction of fire with the mouse, and a *Llamatron*-inspired one-button method lets you lock fire to the direction you're travelling in. It's fitting it's lifted something from Minter; his work continues to offer collage fury, and while PomPom's is cut from a different, shinier, polygonal cloth, it rests on the same principle: purity. Sometimes that's all **Edge** wants, and thankfully, that's all PomPom is interested in providing.





If PomPom can find a willing publisher, a (presumably relatively simple) port to the living room twin sticks of the Xbox could be possible

Blade II

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Mucky Foot**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Summer**

Previously in **E**93

Mucky Foot turns to control scheme to unlock uberviolent idiosyncracies of Marvel's celluloid anti-hero





Judging by the amount of claret being spilled, *Blade II* remains remarkably faithful to the stylish violence that characterised the movie licence



Combat is, as in the movie, fast and fluid, and switching between the various weapons and close combat moves takes little effort thanks to the game's responsive and innovative control scheme



Mucky Foot certainly seems to have gone hell for leather to capture the quintessentially ultraviolent ethos of Marvel's half-man, half-vampire hero. A series of elaborate finishing moves, for example, see the camera swoop round to catch a comprehensive glimpse of Blade disintegrating his opponents with gruesome aplomb, or perhaps severing a limb or two. Then there's the over-the-top arsenal, consisting of an appropriately bombastic selection of firepower as well as Blade's trademark glaive, and of course the game's hero also has access to a series of martial arts moves.

The chief innovation though, is a control system that allows 360-degree combat. Instead of having to laboriously turn and face every individual attacker, this control scheme allows a speedy response in any direction – necessary given the game's abundance of assailants. But judging by early preview code, the real measure of Mucky Foot's success in creating a compelling game, apart from merely distilling the essence of the franchise, will be whether the enemy AI will present a sufficiently balanced challenge. If it's done right, *Blade II* could be the most successful 3D adaptation of the scrolling beat 'em up genre. If it's not, then it will just join the swollen ranks of quite average thirdperson action adventures based on lucrative licenses.

Sega GT

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Wow Entertainment**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4**

It may have a photo album to store snaps and a damage meter, but otherwise, Sega's tuned-up car collecting title is looking slightly staid





Many car manufacturers have given the stamp of approval to *Sega GT*. These include Toyota, Honda, Audi, Mazda, Dodge, Ford and Nissan

A truly astounding driving game has yet to be released on one of the next-generation platforms. Unfortunately, *Sega GT* is unlikely to be that game. Although offering excellent options, such as the chance to race classic vehicles from the '60s, '70s and '80s in the Chronicle mode, Sega's effort to out-Polyphony the *Gran Turismo* series feels a bit like a cheap Alastair McGowan impression. Licence tests, grids containing only six cars, even final position rankings in bright orange are all a bit too familiar.

It's a pity Sega has failed to stamp its presence on the GT concept because in other areas the game could well excel. Although the handling still feels a touch bouncy, it already shows more refinement than that found in *Sega GT Homologation Special* on Dreamcast. Visually, too, there's some good detail, though there's still the washed-out glaze we've experienced before in other Xbox driving titles.

In terms of tune-ups and garage options you can expect a gamut of upgrades; EMC chips, sport exhausts, turbos and weight reductions, etc. Again, it's all very *Gran Turismo*, but with slightly less polish in its presentation.

With over 125 cars, replay options and a garage photo album, *Sega GT* is likely to offer Xbox gamers the kind of racing sim depth PS2 owners have become accustomed to. But will it prove more satisfying than Polyphony's efforts? Prognosis remains doubtful.





Although physical damage does not appear on the car, a damage meter goes down whenever your vehicle gets into a scrape. The cost of repairs made to the chassis is then taken off any winnings you may have gleaned from the race

Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix 4

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Symergy**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September**

The quiet man of coding returns to the ring with what many are hoping is the first authentic F1 driving simulation to come to a console





The PC version of *Grand Prix 4* has already garnered impressive review scores the world over. And while **Edge** is still reluctant to cover the sport – because it encourages tired yearly sequels – Geoff Crammond's decision to bring the most authentic racing series to a console for the first time deserves comment.

Present code suggests that there's very little to separate the console version from its PC counterpart. Handling remains delicately balanced with the minutest adjustment to the physical dimensions of your vehicle having an immediate impact out on the track. Driving aids can be switched off one by one, easing the player into the simulation, and those who hanker after absolute realism are able to set up the car to the specifications of each individual track. Although all the officially licensed cars, all the tracks, pit crews and track marshals will make it into the final game, the visuals, while more than competent, do lack a certain pizazz. Certainly trackside textures lack depth and detail.

Yet it's ironic that the most dynamic F1 title comes to Xbox just as the sport is in its sorriest state for years. Indeed, it was the struggling Arrows team that provided all the technical assistance to make the game so authentic. Let's hope the final build will provide more drama than this season's Schumacher-dominated boreathon.





As in the previous Crammond *Grand Prix* games, driving aids can be taken off incrementally to ease you into the stresses and strains of F1 driving. Although the cars are beautifully modelled, the track and trackside scenery is a little bland





As you'd expect, animated pit crews make it into the game. In *Grand Prix 4*, however, several pit crews can come out to tend their drivers' cars

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

C&C Generals

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **EA Pacific**



A chance for Westwood's realtime strategy franchise to shine again. This time it's brought a 3D engine along hoping to enhance immersion

Gekido

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Napstream**



Originally a pretty but ultimately flawed attempt at resurrecting the scrolling beat 'em up on the PS, a change of format could suit the game well

The Revenge of Shinobi

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **3D6 Games**



Ninja fever continues with the assassins now sneaking into the handheld market. Expect traditional platform action later this year

Unreal II

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Legend**



Judging by the latest shots, Legend appears to be enjoying itself. The release date is still TBC, although it is expected before the end of 2002

Riding Spirits

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment**
Developer: **Spike**



Overtakes *GT* in terms of attention to detail and the PAL version is expected to undergo a series of improvements over its Japanese release

Need for Speed Hot Pursuit 2

Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **In-house**



The first *NFS* title to intrigue **Edge** in years, there would seem to be a little more here than just the predictable selection of automotive exotica

Turbo Turtle Adventure

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Majesco**
Developer: **Iridon Interactive**



Lying somewhere between *Marble Madness* and *Super Monkey Ball*, *TTA* doesn't look pretty, but has a simple – and compulsive – inertial charm

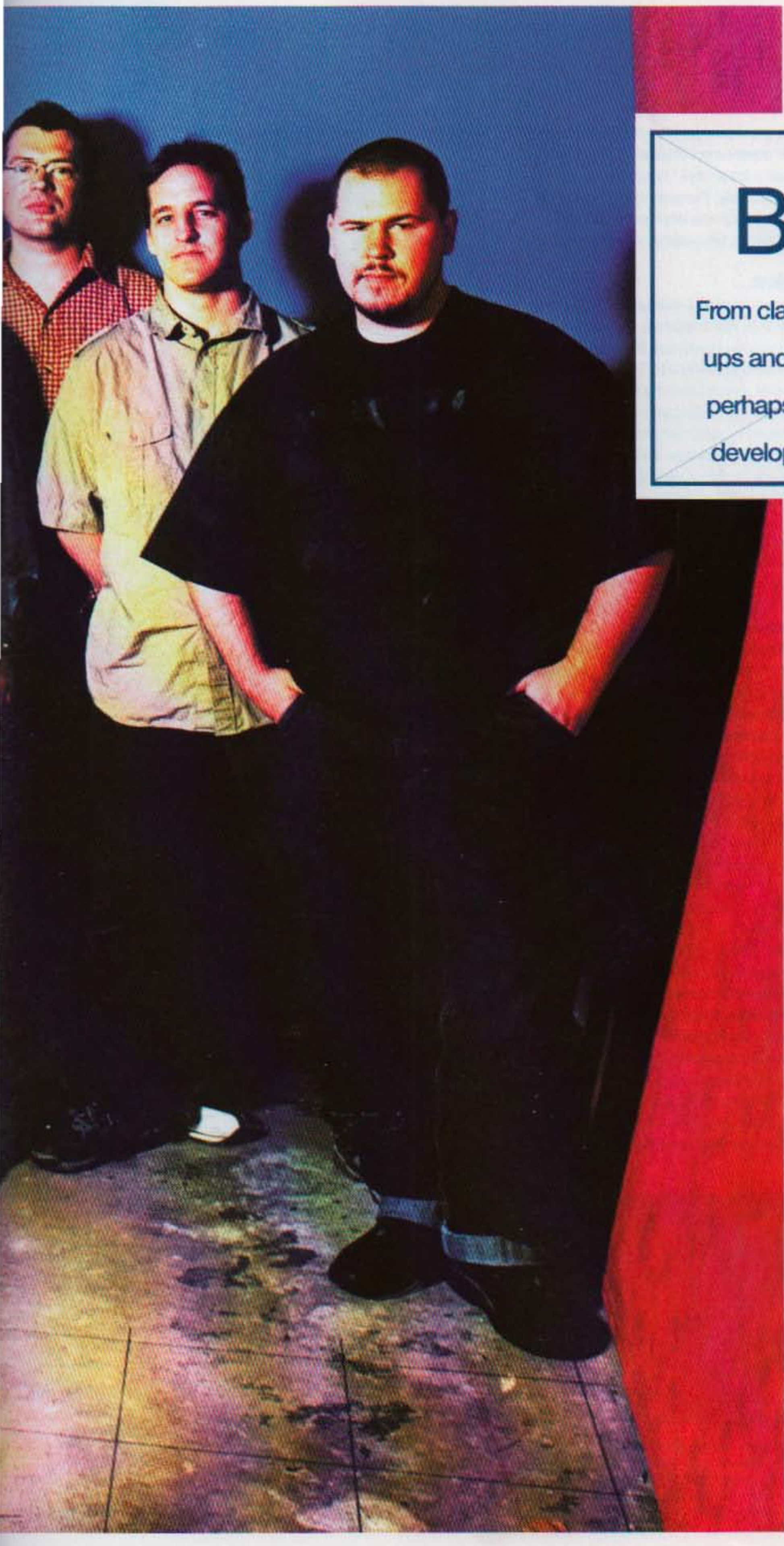
New World Order

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Bigben Interactive**
Developer: **Termite**



Another day, another PC FPS with an emphasis on team-based multiplayer. Obscene levels of realism should ensure success amongst the anal





Photography: **Nick Wilson**

Inside...

Bits Studios

From classic arcade ports to modern stealth 'em ups and GBA strategy games, Bits Studios has perhaps the most diverse line-up of any British developer. So how come no one's heard of it?

Edge doesn't go to Cricklewood that often. It's not a bustling centre of videogame development. In fact, most famous for its architecturally interesting library and the fact that serial killer Dennis Nilsen once lived here, it's not really a bustling centre of anything. Strangely, though, UK developers seem drawn to places like this – parochial, suburban, faintly sinister – why else would so many decamp to Leamington Spa?

Cricklewood is also a hell of a long way to come for a company that even veteran gamers may have trouble recognising. Don't be fooled by the low profile, though – this studio has a long and complicated history. Founder and CEO **Foo Katan** cut his teeth hacking TRS 80 games as a teenager in the early '80s, before moving on to programming. The first game he actually saw released was *Skyline Attack* for the C64, created with classmate Jez San.

After this came several 8bit projects: helping Atari finish BBC Micro conversions of *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong Jr.*, then developing a piece of 8bit cross-platform middleware named PDS (Programming Development System) which took up most of the mid- to late-'80s. Then, in 1990, Katan went to CES (E3) with the intention of snagging some juicy Game Boy conversions. Hawking an early demo of a shoot 'em up around the stands, he closed deals to port *Chase HQ* and *R-Type* to the handheld for Taito and Irem respectively. Bits was born.

Later there were further coin-op conversions – *GunForce* on the SNES, *R-Type II* on GB and several SNES titles for Acclaim including *Terminator 2* and *Wolverine*. In 1994 Bits produced its first original title, *Space Football*, written in conjunction with Argonaut.

Thus began the company's current system of production: contracted work mixed with original titles. Interestingly, in a move away from standard independent developer practice, these originals are only shown to respective publishers toward the end of development. Katan reckons this lessens the risk because he doesn't have to

New visions

Through *Thieves World*, Bits is currently exploring the possibilities of the Xbox Vertex and Pixel Shaders, key visual effects components of the machine's GPU and nfiniteFX Engine. As Katan explains, "Not that long ago, you only had a few states to play with to control a graphics processor, nowadays you get real asm-grade languages. This lets us control what happens to what we display from the high-level tasks such as lighting to the operations carried out on every individual pixel drawn onscreen. The flexibility is awesome, the limits of what you can do with this are still to be found, I think.

One very visible use of the pixel shaders in *TW* is in special vision where we wanted to attract the player's attention to some elements: the pixel shader applies a gamma ramp to the intensities so as to increase contrast without range loss, and generate a shade of green from this. It also analyses the colours, isolates what is red and applies another, steeper, gamma ramp on it, keeping it red. Depending on which is the more intense, it picks a value or the other. The result is a mode where everything that is white or red stands out from the image that otherwise is not much more than a traditional night-vision."



FAQ

Company name: Bits Studios
Founded: 1990
HQ: Cricklewood, London
Number of employees: 55
Projects in development: *Die Hard Vendetta*, *Thieves World*, *Jet Riders*, *Wizards*, and an unannounced GBA title (see text)

make grand promises to potential buyers early in the development process. "It also means you get a better deal," he points out, conspiratorially. The system is obviously working – Bits now employs 55 staff and has an ambitious five projects in development.

Police…

Having worked on a multitude of film licences in the '90s, Bits is returning to the much-maligned oeuvre with one of its key projects, the promising GameCube FPS, *Die Hard Vendetta*. Action takes place a few years after 'Die Hard With a Vengeance' – John McClane's daughter joins the police and gets kidnapped by terrorists who turn out to be under the control of Hans Gruber's sons – Gruber being Alan Rickman's high class Euro thief in the first film. The script has been written in conjunction with Fox and contains plenty of typical Willis one-liners, as well as recognisable plot elements and characters from the series (Dick Thornburg the TV reporter and the Nakatomi Plaza are back).

Vendetta is a firstperson shooter, but Bits is aiming to squeeze more from the genre than blood and bullets. Foo talks about rich characterisation and plentiful stealth elements. As in, say *Deus Ex*, there are always two ways to clear each of the 11 levels – a sneak about in the shadows method (which can involve disguises and hostage-taking) and an all guns blazing method. Set-pieces include warehouses and factories as well as recognisable versions of famous LA locations – the team wanted to capture both the flavour of the city, and its intrinsic weirdness to outsiders.

There are some nice little details already evident. Saving members of the public earns the player 'Hero' points which can be accumulated and used to activate a slow-mo feature, similar to the one in *Max Payne*. While in Hero mode enemy movements are slowed down so the player can take out more targets and dodge bullets – plus, in an allusion to the films, Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' plays in the background. There's also an amusing fatal bullet feature. Take out one of the game's four







bosses and the camera follows your final bullet in slow-mo to its destination. Gratuitous and not new, but nicely cinematic.

…and thieves

Another major original title for the studio – this time unaccompanied by the safety cushion of a lucrative licence – is *Thieves World* (working title). Set for GameCube, Xbox and PS2 release in Q1 2003, it's a thirdperson stealth adventure following acrobatic cat burglar, Tura, on nine robbery missions through a futuristic metropolis known as High City.

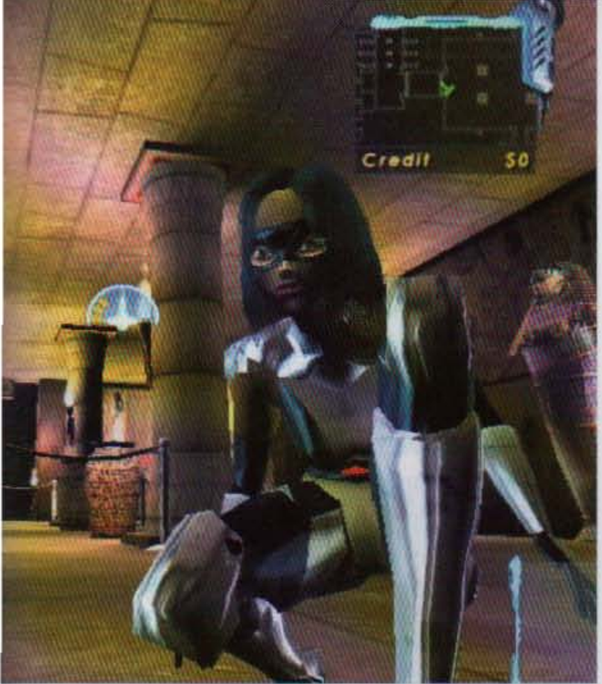
Although at first these tasks seem unconnected, they are linked by a conspiracy-style backstory revolving around a shadowy mega corp named Tekhne. Apparently, Tura's father once worked for the outfit producing hi-tech military equipment until he was killed in an accident. The truth about his demise and other dodgy corporate activities are of course revealed in cut-scenes as you go though.

The range of steely sci-fi settings includes museums, laboratories and, appropriately, seemingly impenetrable bank vaults – all teeming with security droids, guards and CCTV systems. Naturally, the player gets a range of gadgets to aid in the infiltration process, including a retinal scanner (to capture the ocular data of security staff and use it to open doors) and a pair of multi-use special-vision goggles, that can see through walls and under flooring to spot hidden traps, hidden enemies and hidden connections between objects. For example, in one room you may get





Gameplay in *Thieves World* is based around avoiding detection, so the character has a range of moves allowing her to explore inconspicuously. In some areas alerting the guards means 'game over' immediately



Players can choose from a range of outfits but it's not about aesthetic, each has pros and cons relating to stealth capabilities, armour and weaponry

a safe that you can't open. Flip on the spec vision, however, and you could find a sub-floor wire connecting the locking mechanism to a power source. Shut down the power and you have access. It's an interesting concept.

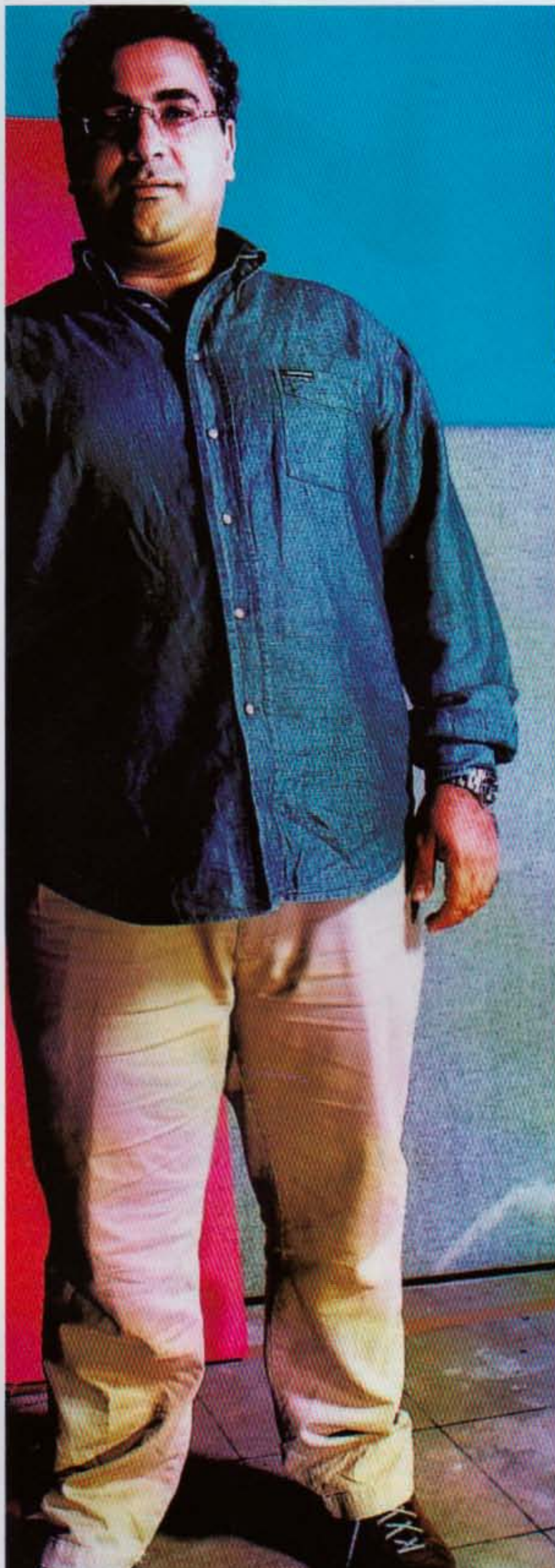
Also interesting is the hand-to-hand combat system which mixes *Final Fantasy*-style turn-based fighting with a little rhythm action. When you approach an enemy and switch into combat mode you're given a move to perform, based on the location and status of the target. This move requires you to input a sequence of d-pad moves and button presses within a strict time limit: get it right and the move is executed, get it wrong and the enemy gets a chance to block and fight back.

As in the RPG genre, there's a chance this could be alienating, continually snapping you out of the naturalistic settings, but Bits believes that it's a decent alternative to the unreliable realtime combat found in most thirdperson titles. In any case, you've also got the choice to pick off guards and security droids from a distance with a selection of guns.

Clearly Bits is going for accessibility here. Most actions from jumping and climbing to picking things up are accessed via a single button. Furthermore, you can only carry four objects at once, doing away with the oppressively large inventories of *MGS* et al. If the missions are truly open to non-linear exploration and individual experimentation, there's a good adventure title in the making. Scenery is barren at the moment, and character animation is erratic and unconvincing, but these are minor tweaks.

Back to Game Boy

In a return to the very beginning of Bits, the company is also engaged in three Game Boy projects, although now of course it's the Advance model. First up is *Jet Riders*, a jet-ski racing and freestyling title combining gameplay

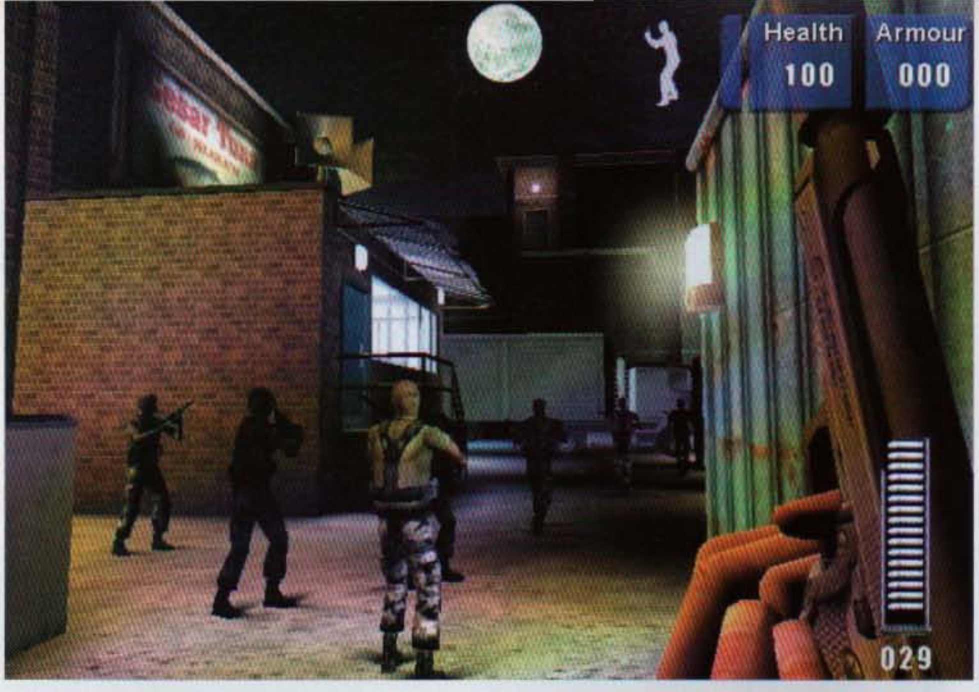












This is far too many enemies for John McClane to take out in one go. Instead, creep up behind one, knock him out and drag him away. Soldiers can even be used as hostages, but make sure you get a commanding officer, not an expendable grunt









Wizards employs the cute 2D visuals of an old SNES RPG, many of the buildings are destructible offering hidden routes through the landscape



Jet Riders uses a *Super Sprint*-style top-down view to provide not dissimilar quirky, impulse gameplay. You can spray wash on a tight turn to knock over scenic objects

elements from *Wave Race 64* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. The singleplayer mode takes in both race and stunt stages, the latter offering grinding, air barrel rolls, tail stands and somersaults through button and direction combinations. Racing, via a top-down view, is surprisingly authentic. On corners, the craft slides right into the water and you have to get used to using momentum to your advantage. The shoulder buttons act as quick turning devices (or pressed together for a speed boost) and mastering these adds more depth to the handling experience.

It's a nice little game, boosted by the inclusion of a fourplayer race mode which only requires one cart. The GBA racing genre hasn't been saturated with quality titles yet so there's plenty of room for a quirky newcomer.

Evil sorceress

Slightly more ambitious perhaps is *Wizards* a clever combination of RTS, RPG and *Gauntlet*-style arcade romp. Here you're an arch wizard battling against the evil sorceress Kun-Mara whose forces are gradually taking over the kingdom of Talismania. You begin with a small army in the south of the kingdom and must choose your own route through forests, caverns and castles to the mountains in the North, recruiting, or exhuming (via magic), new troops on the way. Your soldiers can be broken up into units and assigned simple guard or attack objectives. While under direct control, they'll also fire, en masse, in any direction you place the cursor, or in all directions if you put the cursor in the middle of your troops, allowing multiple beasties to be taken out in one sweep. It's a fun system, the screen filling with projectiles as your warriors do battle with sundry dragons, grim reapers and goblins (who amusingly pick your soldiers up and eat them).

The game contains two collectible resources – gold and karma. The former is hidden throughout the landscape and can be used to buy new spells. Karma is a kind of magical force sucked from vanquished foes – when your karma meter is full, you can perform one of the purchased spells. Along with the fighting, exploration and resource management, Bits is also promising puzzle and perhaps even trading elements (players may be able to swap units and spells with friends). Finally there's a single-cart multiplayer option offering various gameplay modes.

It's another rather promising project, apparently offering both depth and instant playability via the simple yet exhaustive cursor-driven interface. The cute visuals are reminiscent of *Link's Awakening* at times, and the gameplay seems to hover between Nintendo's classic Game Boy title and the more recent *Advance Wars*. Katan also reckons it's really pushing the GBA hardware, "Just the idea that you can have 100 units moving at the same time on a GBA, who may be shooting, colliding and navigating within the environment while the game run at 60fps is *very* cool. To achieve this, the whole game has been written in ARM assembler code. The use of scaling sprites is also nice, mixed in with the spells, and layered graphics to give you a feel of 3D view. You have to see how much goes on at the same time onscreen to fully appreciate it."

There's one more GBA title in development at Bits, a high-profile old skool conversion which sadly **Edge** is not allowed to talk about yet. Rest assured, veteran gamers, especially those who frequented arcades between 1985 and 1987, will definitely be interested. Even without this potential gem, the line-up is solid and varied. It's a long journey from anonymous conversion house to recognised developer of original titles, but Bits is on its way. **Edge** may one day have to return to Cricklewood.







box clever

Boxart is not always high on the list of priorities for a publisher, but the final presentation of a videogame can mean the difference between a bestseller and a bargain bin has-been. **Edge** explores the influence of the full package and takes a look at some of the best (and worst) examples of the form



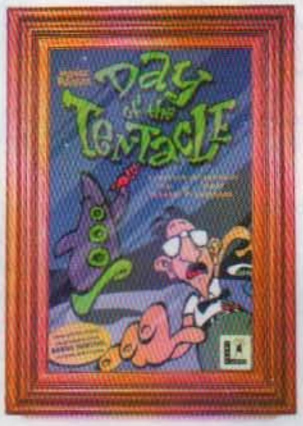




Videogame outlets are a lot more inviting than they used to be. Gone are the frayed carpets, dilapidated shelving units and the sort of aroma that only pervades around groups of teenagers. That stereotype is a thing of the past. Since videogames became big business every aspect of the process has been overhauled. In a bid to move with the times – and sell even more units – publishers and retailers have increasingly concentrated on developing the appeal of the final product.

"When a consumer walks into his or her local store, they need to identify with the product and the last line of communication prior to purchase is the packaging and supplementary POS [point of sale]," states **Russell Uttley**, director of design firm Department.X, which has developed boxart images for some of the world's most prolific games, including *Silent Hill 2* and *Metal Gear Solid*. For Uttley the power of the final image can't be underestimated. "With such choice, the packaging has to make the right statement and is integral to the overall communication strategy. In the battle for consumer attention each pack art has to tell its own story and stand out against the competition."

But powerful design imagery, impactful POS materials and specifically tailoring products to enhance sales in every territory were not always uppermost in the minds of videogame publishers







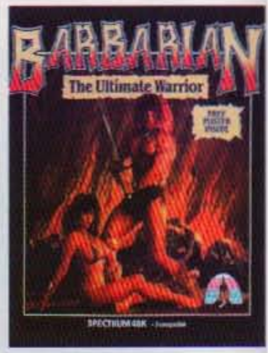










Point of impact

Some early videogame boxart teetered over the edge of the taste threshold. Imagine's *Game Over* cover and ad clearly depicted a bare-breasted woman. Even 'Crash' magazine's art editor, **Oliver Frey**, was a little surprised at the image. "There was no way we could print it," he remembers. "So I had to dress her up in a thin grey corset thing." Even so, retailers demanded that logos be placed over the nipples.





during the dawn of the industry. The fact is, early videogame packaging was terrible, much of it compounding the view that games were only played by socially inept teenagers. Witness the artwork for *Legend of the Amazon Women*. It was a particularly poor Spectrum game, but it became infamous for its cover and advertising art. It provoked not a few letters to games magazines in the early '80s and many people found the artwork tasteless. More discerning minds criticised the art for a better reason: the standard of physical drawing was shockingly bad.

Bob Wakelin is one of the most famous artists from that era. Commissioned by Ocean between 1985 and 1990 he created some of the most distinctive and collectable art from the period. He knew all too well the standards of the time. "The art around when I started was terrible," he states. "There was very little that made an impression on me and a lot of it looked amateurish." But Wakelin was realistic about what publishers and players wanted. "Big explosions, big guns and big tits. But there was only so far you could go and most of the games didn't involve female characters anyway. It was only occasionally that I got the chance to produce softcore porn."

Despite the inclination to stimulate teenage fantasy, Wakelin's art did exude a charm often missing from rivals' work. And unlike the lead times given to today's designers, he would have just two or three days to produce the artwork for a full game package. Now the process is much more controlled. Sometimes the artwork for triple-A products is considered a full 12 months before the game is due for release. However, in most cases, three to six months is standard.

Territorial advantage

Localising products to the tastes of particular regions has never been so important and sensitive since the events of September 11, and publishers have increasingly put aside larger budgets to ensuring maximum sales potential in each key region. "The American market is a more 'in your face' market to design for," believes Uttley. "Whereas the European market tends to be more refined and subtle with its approach. But even then, you can usually have the six major territories' opinions to take on board when you're considering a pan-European campaign. The main alterations we have had to make recently is obscuring weaponry – guns in particular. The American market is currently advocating obscuring guns as much as possible on the covers of their games, be it with a logo or cropping it off the pack. And Germany has very strict censorship laws when it comes to guns – you can't produce any imagery where the character is pointing the gun directly at the consumer."

Kenji Kanno, producer and designer at Sega's sub-division Hitmaker is acutely aware of the differences between tastes in the east and the west. "In the case of the North American market the package is a kind of ad where you see the game feature and the logo," he asserts. "The colours and layout are made to meet this objective. Conversely, the Japanese package is not a tool but a mix of the game essence and the ad. In stores you will find an additional element to catch your eyes – different from the game itself. So in Japan, you will find a greater importance concerning colours and layout."

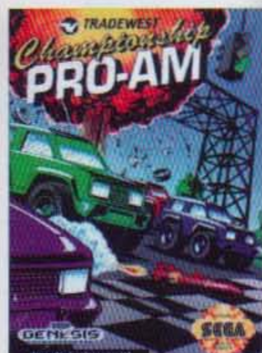
Noticeably the boxart for many Xbox titles has not been altered for European tastes. Certainly, the artwork for *Halo*, *Munch's Oddysee* and *Blood Wake* exudes a brash Americanism which underlines Microsoft's US identity. Although other titles such as *Amped*



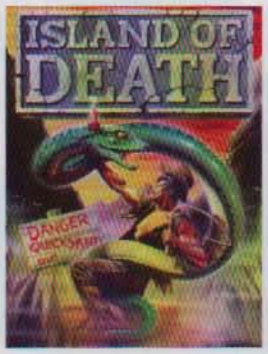


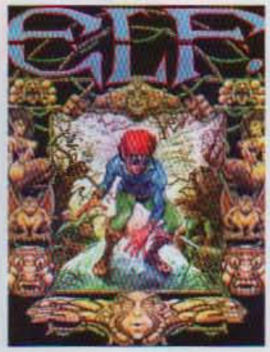














are far better, *Project Gotham Racing* is perhaps one of the worst examples of boxart in recent memory. **Harvey Lee**, Microsoft's European firstparty marketing manager skirts around the issue of why initial US and European Xbox artwork is the same, but offered hope for the future. "Xbox packaging in Europe is already evolving on a more local basis. The launch titles are great and we are very proud of them, but we have even more real depth coming through in our firstparty portfolio in the future and the European packaging will reflect this."

State of independence

The state of modern videogame art is certainly inconsistent. For every *Ico*, there will be 100 boxes with lazy renders set into relief by orange and yellow explosions. The major publishers are turning to independent design studios more often, not just to get a fresh perspective on boxart, but also to help produce cutting edge POS materials for retailers. Predictably, it's the retailers that call the shots on which titles to promote and to what degree.

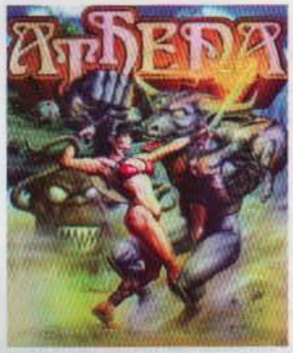
"We coordinate our POS on a weekly basis with a marketing schedule," states **Anna Macario**, head of marketing for GAME Group Ltd. "Products are allocated areas in store ranked in order of prominence. Space is allocated in gradings, from front windows to gondola ends and standees." POS, too – though it only has a fleeting appearance in shops – pays dividends to design companies. Although creating boxart can raise the profile of a design company, it does not always prove to be especially lucrative. One well established consultancy – which wished to remain anonymous – told **Edge** that a major thirdparty publisher paid derisory sums and it "was insulted by the amount of money it paid for boxart." The indignity was only compounded when the publisher decided to play it safe with the original American design and dropped the company's European treatment at the final hour.

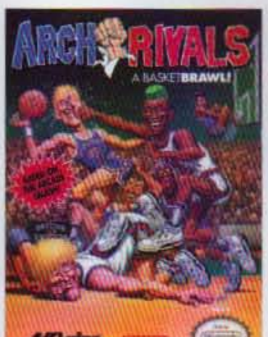
Jonathan Taylor-Horne at Subliminal is all too aware of the difficulties that come with creating cutting edge POS materials. An ambitious location shoot for *Ico* was dropped simply due to time constraints. "The renders we were given were low res so we decided to get some location shots around an old castle in Britain. We were going to hire smoke machines and planned on having people shot in silhouette. Ico we could have done quite easily with a horned helmet and we would have shot Yorda with a cloak. We had photographers and locations all set up, but it never quite happened. For the end product we just had to spend a lot of time re-rendering the images ourselves, so a poster from five feet away would look alright."

GAME Group conduct surveys on the power of packaging and POS in its stores, and though it was not willing to reveal numbers, the company is convinced that powerful imagery deeply affects consumer decision making at the final moment of purchase. But many designers still believe that the industry has some catching up to do. "On the whole the standard of artwork is very low, verging on the insulting, when you compare it to the music and film industry," says Taylor-Horne. "With POS, advertising and boxart there still seems to be a 'haven't we always done it like that – why change?' outlook. But attitudes are beginning to change and designers are using different forms of convergent media and executing those ideas much better." Hopefully such an outlook should bring about an influx of sophisticated imagery into game stores.

Greek love

Bob Wakelin found that examples of his work was unappreciated by more sensitive souls. "There was a lot of controversy over my *Athena* cover," he laughs. "A lot of outraged letters came into Ocean about the sexism. People were actually seeing things in the illustration that weren't there. The female character was fighting a minotaur, but there was a section of the minotaur's armour that loads of people thought was an erect penis. It was never intended that way – it was just people getting excited."









Grisly art

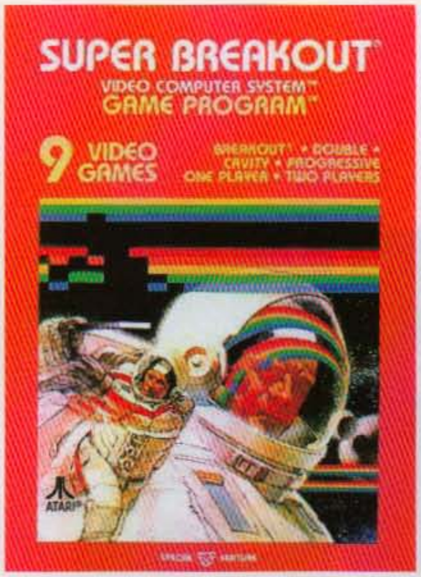






The stunning draughtsmanship evident in Capcom's later boxart (see p57) was lacking in these early efforts. The Elite and US Gold versions of *Ghosts 'n Goblins* and *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*, in particular, lack verve and reveal a laughably poor drawing competence.















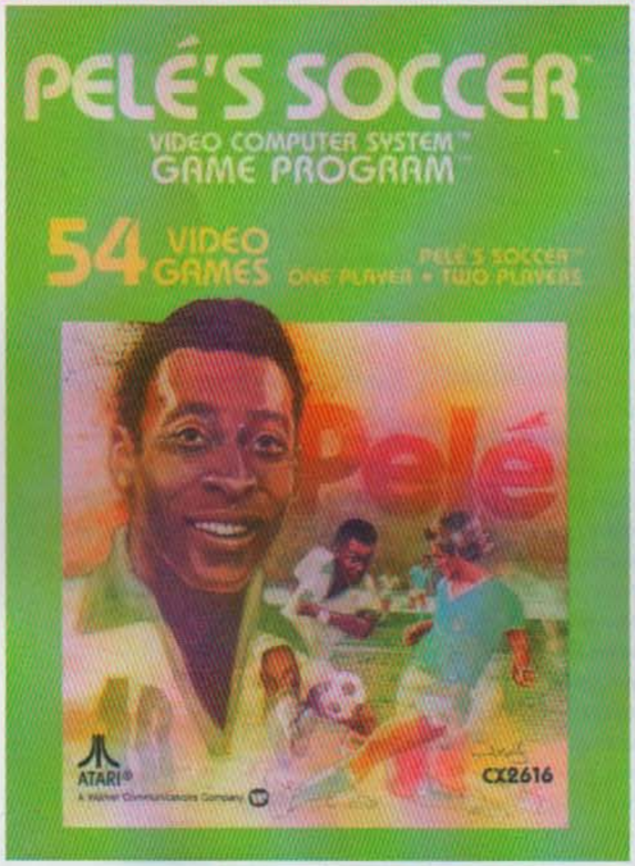


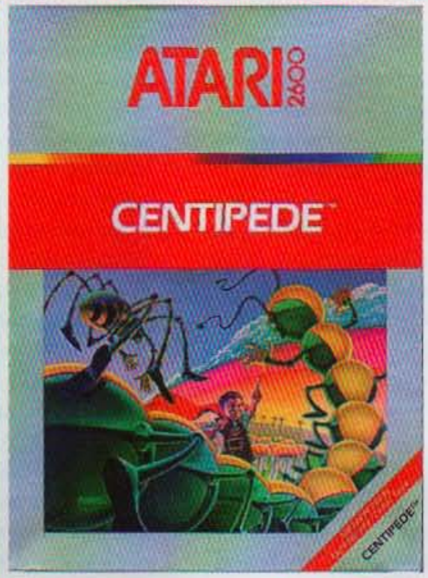
Atari:

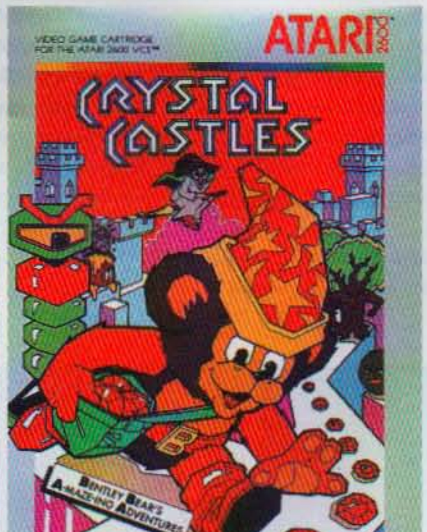
Atari artwork veered from the sublime to the ridiculous. From the captivating '70s sci-fi style of titles such as *Berzerk* to the ordinary looking *Battlezone*, Atari tried many looks over the years. Like the coders, Atari didn't credit its artists for fear that they would be poached by rivals.

Much of the imagery communicates the passion and joy of an emerging medium and still unlocks powerful emotions for retroheads. Vibrant multicoloured boxes were used for the first releases (1979–1982), with a special range of metallic silver boxes soon following. The large number in the top left corner represents the amount of game 'variations' available on the cart. Not a selling point anyone has tried since.













Giger counter



Atari would unashamedly tap into any popular trend if it would help shift units. The alien hunting title, *Xenophobe*, offered a wonderful opportunity to mimic the work of HR Giger on its box front. Ridley Scott's 'Alien' had been released just a few years previously and Giger's work was gaining influence the world over. Obviously, no permission was asked, and as you'd expect, the likeness is merely 'coincidental'.









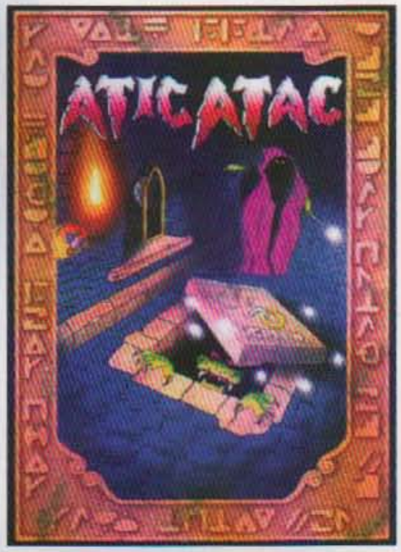






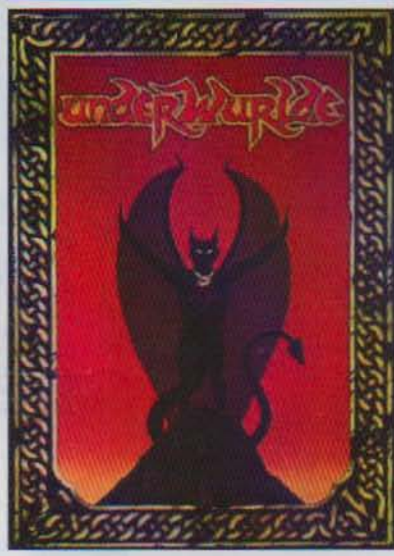






Ultimate:

Formed in 1982 in a small terraced house in Ashby de la Zouch by Tim and Chris Stamper, Ashby Computer and Graphics (hence the ACG on early packaging) had hits with classic titles such as *Jet Pac* and *Pssst*. The change to Ultimate Play the Game followed soon after, and although seminal titles such as *Knight Lore*, *Underwurlde* and *Sabre Wulf* were brilliantly conceived and executed, many will remember the distinctive packaging that showed the games off to their best advantage. Designed by Tim Stamper they sported one single design motif, rich hues and were encased in a sturdy black box. Ultimate games were luxury items to teenagers back in the early- to mid-'80s. Although costing a hefty £9.95 back then, the box design did wonders for sales and certainly helped establish the Ultimate brand as one synonymous with opulence and excellence.















Some of Ultimate's earlier games, including *Jet Pac*, *Lunar Jetman*, *TransAm* and *Cookie*, were released in the standard tape cassette boxes. They were a little cheaper but lacked the impact of the opulently boxed games



Just a few examples of Nintendo US and Japanese artwork. NCL's brand values are maintained no matter how far a game travels



Nintendo Co Ltd:

Judging the tastes of different regions is essential to maximising the sales potential of a videogame. Nintendo's dominance of the US market with the NES clearly taught the company a lot about the values which drive America's youth. Regardless of the minor changes that are made for games such as *Mario 64* and *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, NCL's internal design teams have always emphasised the fun aspects of its games. In essence, the boxart communicates the ebullience of the actual game. Although some consumers will forever sideline Nintendo (because of its perceived kiddie image) the company continues to reject the easy render for its GameCube titles.



Shigeru Miyamoto began at Nintendo as an artist. His distinct style has influenced Nintendo games and artwork for over two decades



There's a significant difference between US and Japanese boxart. *Go Go Trouble Makers* (above) and *Animal Leader* (below) prove just how radical Japanese boxart can be

Art fighting





Capcom's flamboyant Japanese *Street Fighter II* artwork (complete with mad elongated limbs) was rejected in the States for a more realistic interpretation. Although hardly surprising, it would be good to see more original Japanese artwork make it over to the west.

The full package

Mr Driller 2 with GBA box





Super Monkey Ball with GC box



It's not surprising to discover that packaging in Japan is approximately 25 per cent smaller than in the US and Europe. GameCube and Game Boy Advance packaging is particularly cute and Japanese consumers place much more emphasis on good design than a game that merely dominates a lot of space on a retail shelf. Smaller boxes also have an obvious practical function: Japanese homes are smaller, and therefore storage space is much more limited than in the west.





Sega's Mega Drive artwork was largely targeted at teenagers. *The Revenge of Shinobi*, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Sonic Spinball* and *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* all create an impression of fun and vitality. Thirdparty companies, such as Treasure, were encouraged by Sega to develop games with a similar tone, as is evidenced in the *Gunstar Heroes* boxart

Sega:

Arguably, Japanese developers have better resources and superior in-house design teams. Sega has always attempted to keep every aspect of a game's development, including the box cover design, in-house. Kenji Kanno, designer at Hitmaker, believes that consumers can instantly recognise the Sega touch, "I see a package as an information tool – a visual element you use as promotion. So the difference of taste would appear through this tool. If people feel the Sega touch it's because all the people inside the company share the same spirit and move towards the same objective."

Sega has produced some of the most unusual and diverse boxart over the years. Although a box design will often change from region to region, Sega brand values are never lost. Bright, vibrant and colourful the artwork evident on titles such as *Panzer Dragoon*, *Phantasy Star Online*, *Virtual On*, *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* and *Jet Set Radio* are clearly aimed towards dedicated gamers. Literal renders appealing to massmarket consumers hardly ever make an appearance.



Capcom boxart has improved immeasurably since its *Ghosts 'n Goblins* days. The energy, composition and artistry apparent in both *Street Fighter III: W Impact* and *Jo Jo's Bizarre Adventure* (top left, top middle) are magnificent and complement Sega's own hallmarks of colour and imagination. Sega's own refulgent boxart has arguably set the benchmark for others to follow



Videogames were for kids, ran the logic, and early Spectrum boxart reflected this thinking. Big guns, big explosions and dodgy drawings of Bruce Lee were early Konami favourites

Konami:

Like Sega, Konami has always prided itself on delivering an excellent videogame package, from initial game design right through to the final boxed product. Never afraid to take risks, titles such as the *Castlevania* series, *Vandal Hearts* and *Salamander* have avoided 'realistic' artwork in favour of a more stylised aesthetic. Konami's Japanese director of product design, **Yonedo Shizuko** believes that overseas tastes should always be considered. "Sometimes we will even emphasise the Japanese design for an overseas market if we think it will help sales. A few years ago, in Japan, we used to put the main visual with the company name, but many gamers are not buying the game because of the logo but because of the product itself. So now we don't put Konami's image forward, but the game itself. We decided a standard pattern for the logo on the upper left side and always the same size. I guess these corporate identity issues are now the main Konami style for packaging."









The beautiful *Axelay*, the bizarre *Parodious* and the downright strange *Goeman* (main): just a few of the more esoteric early creations of Konami's in-house artists





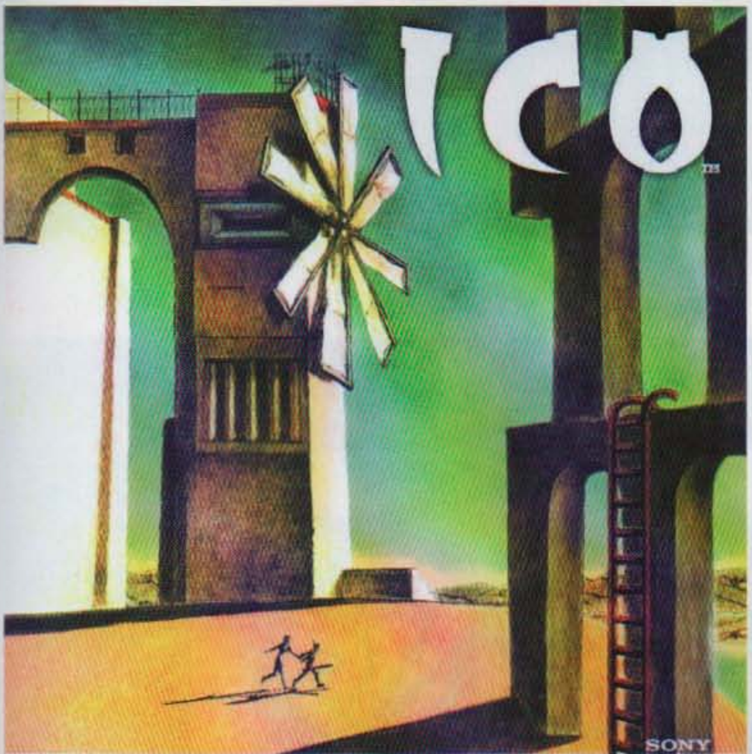
Department.X

Department.X has designed the boxart, promotional materials and instruction manuals for some of Konami's most prolific titles, including the *Metal Gear Solid* and *Silent Hill* franchises. Typically the company gets six months to design the materials for a big-budget game. This includes coming up with as many as ten treatments which will then have to go through several approval stages with product managers, marketing departments and the platform holder.

When Department.X first submitted the original box design for *Metal Gear Solid* – which used the original artwork by Yoji Shinkawa – it was not met with widespread approval, but once sales figures came in, attitudes changed. "It was almost a record sleave approach," remarks Uttley. "There wasn't a single company out there that could create a render that would do the cover as much justice as that artwork. Ultimately, it did phenomenally well and it became the benchmark for an alternative approach to the standard computer render treatment."













Sony Computer Entertainment:

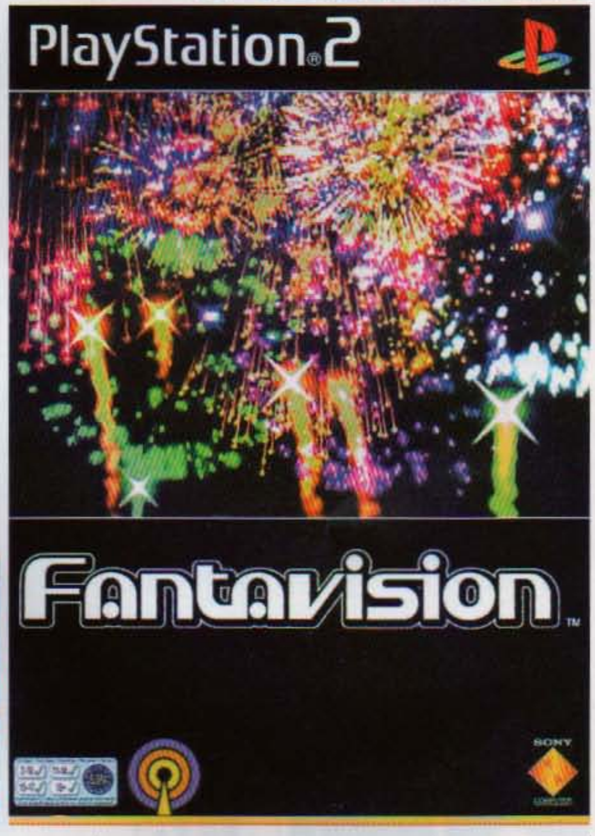
Sony has often been denigrated for dumbing down videogames by bringing the medium to the masses. And while many titles do sport unimaginative renders this simplistic view is overthrown by some of its most beautiful and inventive games, with boxart to match. *Ico* best exemplifies Sony's ability to take chances and SCEI's internal design team came up with *Ico*'s unusual and eye-catching front cover.





















Boxing clever

SCEE takes boxart very seriously and it has both in-house and external design teams producing artwork for many of the company's biggest titles. **Stuart Turner**, Sony's European software manager, believes that boxart has more influence on Sony's lower profile games. "Admittedly, for triple-A titles, it makes little difference. However, for niche games or titles in a competitive genre, sales can be influenced by artwork. It could be argued that for budget titles boxart is perhaps even more important as impulse buys are more common at this price point. The purchaser often makes their decision based on the screenshots and the text on the back of the pack."





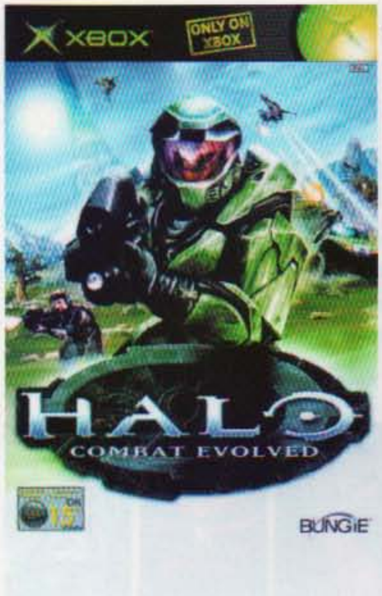
The Japanese artwork for *Gran Turismo* (left) that was also used on the front cover of E55, and the same game with PAL cover

Maximum impact





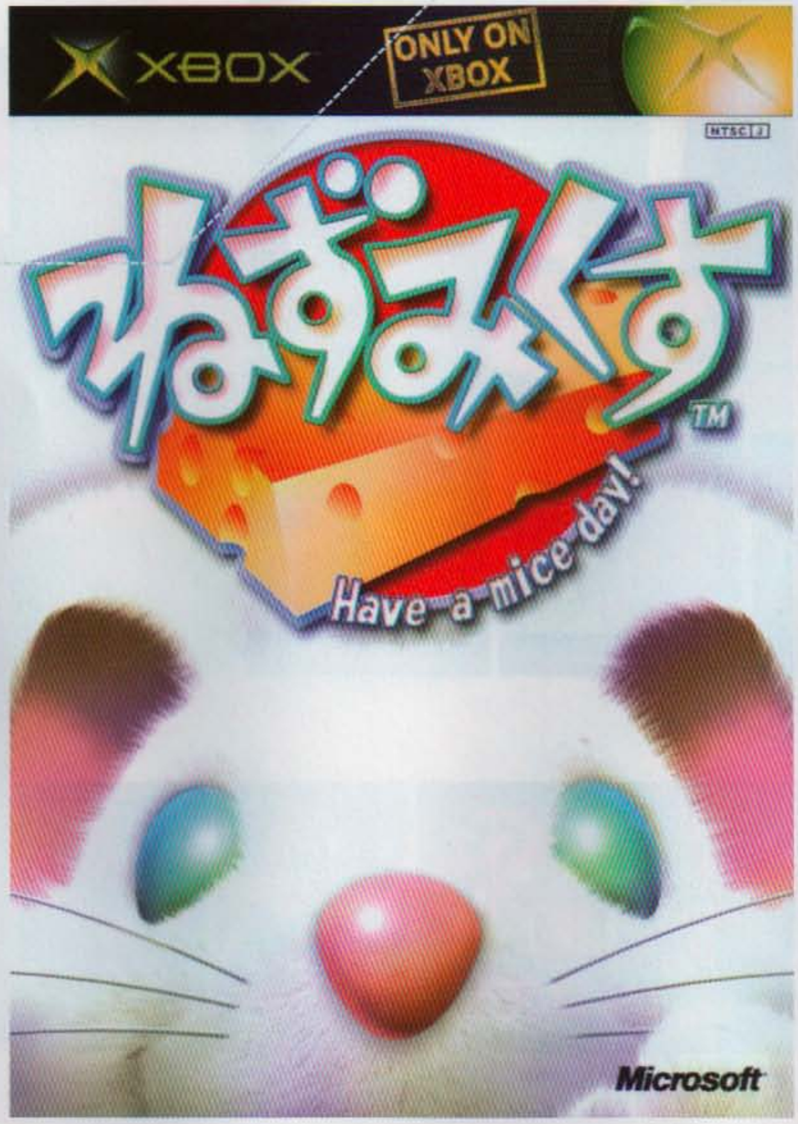
Capcom again, proving that it can create winning designs for all formats. Susumu Matsushita's *Maximo* boxart exemplifies the vibrancy of the game, while the superb Japanese *Strider 2* boxart is far superior to the PAL release.





Microsoft:

In contrast to Sony and Nintendo, Microsoft's early titles had the same box design for all three key territories. **Justin Kirby** manages the Xbox brand identity and creative development in the US. "We asked three design firms to pitch packaging ideas and then selected two designs from each. Then we refined them and brought them to focus groups in the US, Japan and Europe. The winning concept had the strongest impact around the world and stayed relatively intact. However, some cultural differences prevented everything from staying intact. In Japan, for instance, screenshots are never used on the front cover image."





Silence is golden



Asking a thirdparty agency to produce the visuals for a videogame is always risky. An intimate knowledge of gaming and the culture surrounding the form helps. Department.X also produced the materials for *Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams* on Xbox. Fragmented imagery and autumnal shades encapsulate the grainy almost monochrome feel of the game perfectly.

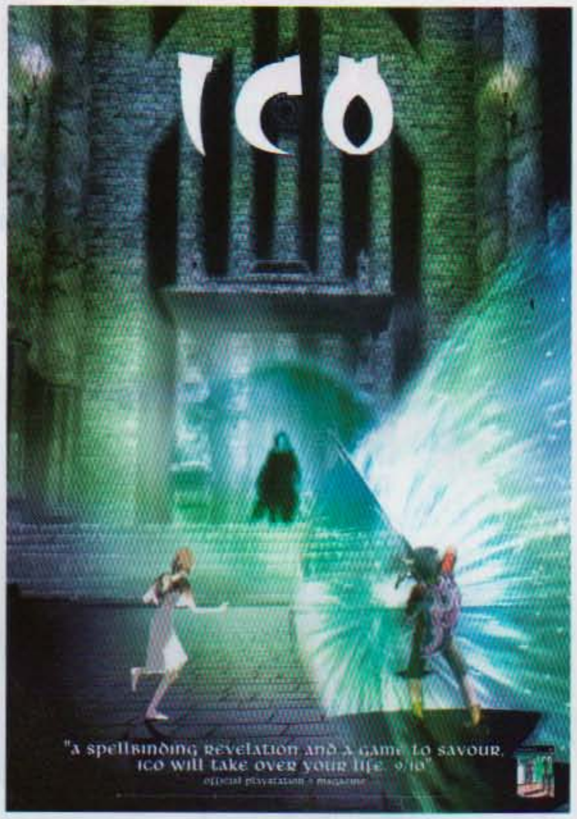


Raw is poor

More recent Xbox boxart, especially thirdparty titles, has differed across all the territories. There are a few good examples of the form, such as *Dead or Alive 3*, but in general, Xbox artwork tends to be bold but crude. *Pirates: the Legend of Black Kat*, *WF Raw* and *Star Wars: Obi-Wan* are particularly bad, lazy efforts.

Cardboard jungle





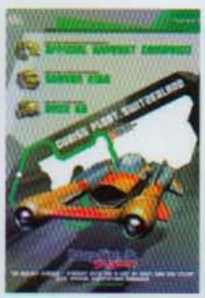
It's impossible to enter the modern videogame outlet without being visually bombarded by ever more elaborate POS materials. From gondola ends to life-size cardboard cut-outs, POS is the final message communicated to the consumer before a purchase is made. "We have conducted focus groups and research with customers at various point and we have been told that POS does help to influence a customer's decision if it promoted well and a professional way," says Anna Macario, head of marketing of GAME Group stores. Although **Edge** readers may feel little swayed by such blatant marketing, POS clearly has a strong influence on the massmarket consumer.

These *Airblade* and *Wipeout* posters, *Ico* standees and board games were all designed by Subliminal. Although months of organisation and design work go into getting POS into stores, they only stay there for two weeks before being 'refreshed' by newer materials.









Bigin' up the brand

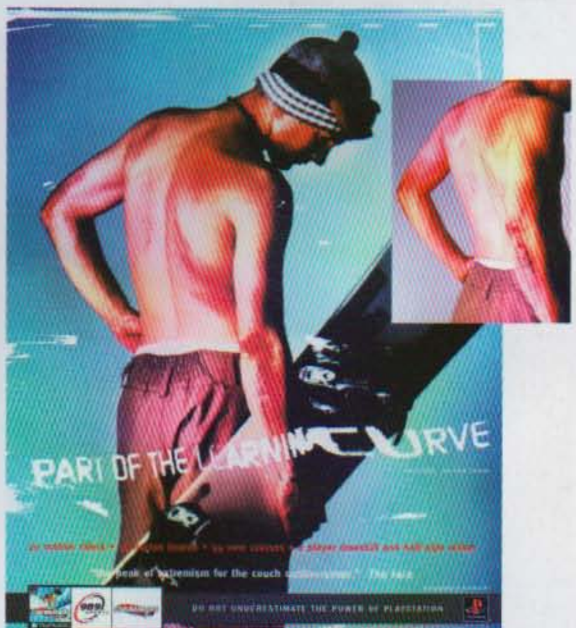








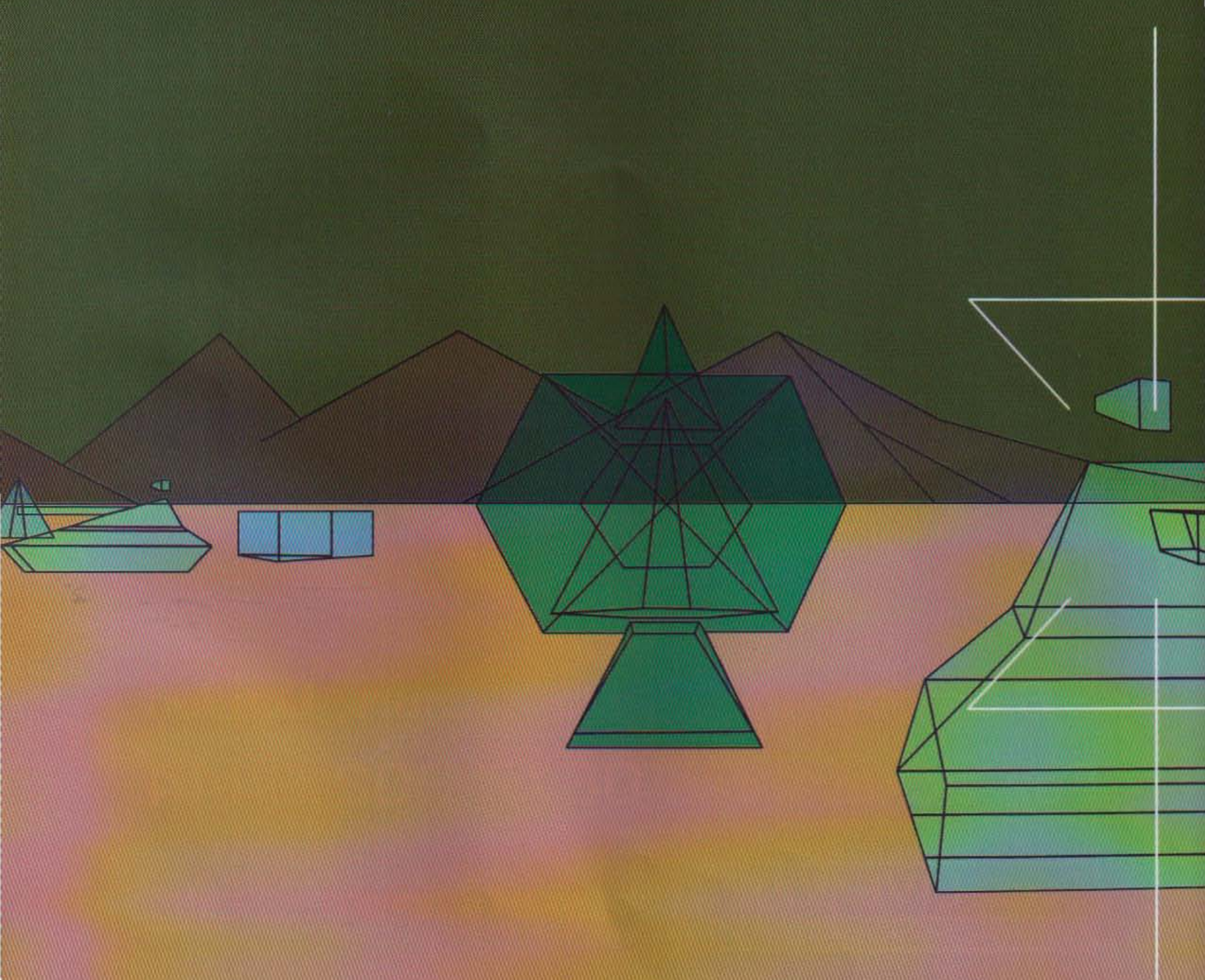
In terms of getting games into the hands of consumers EA leaves nothing to chance. Nine EA representatives, covering each region of the UK, sell POS to retail and ensure that stands are regularly stocked with EA product. EA will even produce 'testimonials' from retailers so that other outlets will be convinced of the power of POS.



Not all photo shoots for POS materials goes according to plan. Sony was so concerned that the heavy bruising and cuts evident in its *Cool Boarders 3* ads would upset consumers that Subliminal was told to airbrush out the scars in Photoshop

Wargames

Videogames are winning new converts throughout the world's armed forces but what is the military doing playing with games and what does it mean for the future of warfare?



Taking up the space of two football pitches and costing a whopping £330m, the British army's latest dabble in virtual warfare is the kind of project that the military has not got involved in since the end of the Cold War. Contained within the confines of a hangar in Warminster, the project offers the army the chance to host large-scale virtual battles using dozens of wide-area network connected simulators. Known as the Combined Arms Tactical Trainer (CATT) the Lockheed Martin developed project is certainly cutting edge, but in some ways it is also a throwback to the days when the military had the best technology and the games industry took what hi-tech cast-offs it could from it.

But all this seems to be changing. Since the Cold War ended the military has been subjected to large budget cuts while at the same time



CATT – the Army's new £330m plaything described by a spokesman for developers Lockhead Martin as "the ultimate videogame." Up to 800 soldiers can take part at once in this virtual warzone



videogames have grown into one of the biggest entertainment industries. But look back a couple of decades and things were rather different. Military researchers developed technologies that were vital for the games industry. Technology such as LCD screens, a British military invention, opened the door for handheld gaming. In the US the military created what would become the Internet as an indestructible communication tool, paved the way for *Spacewar!* to spread across American universities and (eventually) kick-started online gaming. If it was not for military cash it is questionable whether microprocessors would have even been invented.

The long line of military simulators from the likes of Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems and Thomson CSF have pioneered computer graphics and simulation game developers have often sought advice and endorsement from the military. However, more recently the tables have begun to turn and increasingly the military is looking at how it can exploit game technology. "In the past, military technology was usually spun out to the private industry with things like landing a man on the moon resulting in Teflon pans," notes **Chris Moseley**, spokesman for QientiQ, the soon to be privatised research arm of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). "Now, however, commercial technology is becoming so advanced that it spins into the military."

QientiQ should know as, together with the MoD, it is using a customised version of *Half-Life* to test how new weaponry and equipment may impact on the battlefield. **Chris Morris**, technical manager of warfighting experimentation at QientiQ, explains, "The MoD is looking to exploit synthetic environments for a variety of purposes. One of these purposes is to experiment with new weapons and tactics which is where *Half-Life* comes in."

With the help of games developer Maverick Developments, QientiQ has turned the *Half-Life* engine into DIVE (Dismounted Infantry Virtual Environment) a research tool designed to model the impact on tactics of cutting edge military technology such as laser or energy weapons.

Although based on a game, the military has made a whole host of fundamental changes to the software, notably the removal of *Half-Life*'s sci-fi setting. DIVE also leaves soldiers in the dark as to how much ammo is in their gun and players are much more vulnerable to being shot. The ability to shoot through floors, doors, ceilings and walls also features.

According to Maverick Development's managing director **Phil Daniels**, the project is a world away from game design. "It's totally different. In a game you are creating a fun experience based on an imaginative design that is designed to provide entertainment," he explains. "In comparison this product sets out to reproduce actual experiences, both in appearance and behaviour. The purpose is to test actions and evaluate results, helping to learn from the results and apply them to taking that same action in real life."

Of course, *Half-Life*'s military reinvention is just the latest in a long line of hit games that have wormed their way into the world



It may use the *Half-Life* engine and look like an old firstperson shooter but DIVE is being touted as a military tool that could influence the kind of weaponry and equipment the British military will be using in ten years' time. And, yes, the poor monsters have been removed

"If it was not for military cash it is questionable whether microprocessors would have even been invented"

"We made a bombing simulation for the Jaguar fighter squadrons which we named TITS. No one seemed to notice the name"



of the armed forces. Now defunct flight simulation specialists Digital Image Design (DID), for example, spent a significant part of the '90s utilising its PC know-how to produce simulations for the RAF. "Our first dealings with the military happened in 1993 just after DID released *TFX*," recalls **Martin Kenwright**, managing director of Evolution Studios and former head of DID. "We made a laser-guided bombing simulation for the Jaguar fighter squadrons which we named TITS – Thermal imaging laser designation Interactive Training Systems.

"No one seemed to notice the name during the procurement process, although it did later cause a stir," laughs Kenwright. "Anyway these laser-guided weaponry systems went on to be used by frontline RAF pilots in Oman for training and we got a large amount of interest from doing it with something like 350 requests from armed forces asking us to work with them."

Other games companies have also dabbled in the military market, most famously Atari in the early '80s with a souped up version of its wireframe 3D arcade game *Battlezone*. Although the project did cause internal friction at Atari (some of the more peace loving Californian coders were appalled that their game was to be used as a killing sim) it did go ahead. However, how extensively the game was used as a tank training tool by the US army remains sketchy.

Veteran game developer Digital Integration was also involved with the military with its mid-'90s PC flight sim *Tornado* even being used by the RAF's legendary 617 Squadron – better known as The Dambusters. "In fact we recently got a call from 617 Squadron asking for our help as their copy of *Tornado* had got damaged. They were about to head to a posting in the Gulf and wanted a replacement CD as they use it for mission planning and so forth," beams **Nick Mascall**, head of R&D at Digital Integration.

Training tool

More recently Codemasters has been helping the US army turn *Operation Flashpoint* from a hit PC game into a military training tool. "The US military was interested because the game offered control of several troops at once, the ability to play online, a great map facility for planning tactics and because it used combined arms," says **David Solari**, Codemasters' senior marketing manager in the US. "There's also been interest from the Australian army and US secret service." Underpinning this increasing interest from the military in the potential of games is the convergence of the technology being used by the armed forces and being used in videogames.

Ian Bickerstaff, a simulation specialist at BAE Systems, says that in the past decade videogame graphical technology has rapidly caught up with the systems being used in hardcore military simulations such as CATT. "Ten years ago we were using Silicon Graphics machines with features like z-buffering, on board texture mapping and high quality anti-aliasing. The sort of things that we are now beginning to see on PC graphics cards and on PlayStations," he explains. "The technology



Information and advice from the military is often sought by developers and publishers to help ensure a game's accuracy and realism. Just Flight's latest release, *Dambusters* was made with the help of current day members of the Dambuster squadron, and BAE Systems helped on Digital Image Design's *EF2000* sim which is based on the still-yet-to-be-made Eurofighter aircraft

Dirty fighting

While elements in the military are happy to wax lyrical about the return on investment offered by taking advantage of videogame technology, the trend does raise several moral questions. For those crusading against videogame violence the military-games crossover is perfect for their argument that games can be harmful to children. Moral questions of whether to let the military turn a game from entertainment to a primer for killing is also one developers have to tackle.

"There were some moral issues to work through initially," admits Kenwright, "but these sims were no different to what we were already doing." In contrast Maverick's Phil Daniels believes the ethical arguments aren't a problem, "We would rather the people that risk their lives in protecting us have the very best in training we can provide."



Despite the graphical prowess of BAE Systems' flight simulators (above) the distance between PC game graphics and £multi-million simulators is increasingly small. However BAE Systems does boast an edge thanks to banks of PC graphics cards



is definitely migrating down. Whereas ten years ago we could see where the future of computer graphics was going to be, now many of our image generators are based on PC graphics technology rather than custom-built hardware."

Mascall agrees, "Until recently there was a fairly wide gap between the aerodynamic maths you could afford to implement on a home PC compared to a big military simulator; however, this gap has narrowed considerably." This convergence of technology prompted some people to call for the use of gaming technology in the military. **Pete Birch**, a former RAF wing commander who helped pioneer the use of gaming technology in the RAF, believes game-derived simulations could and should save the MoD millions.

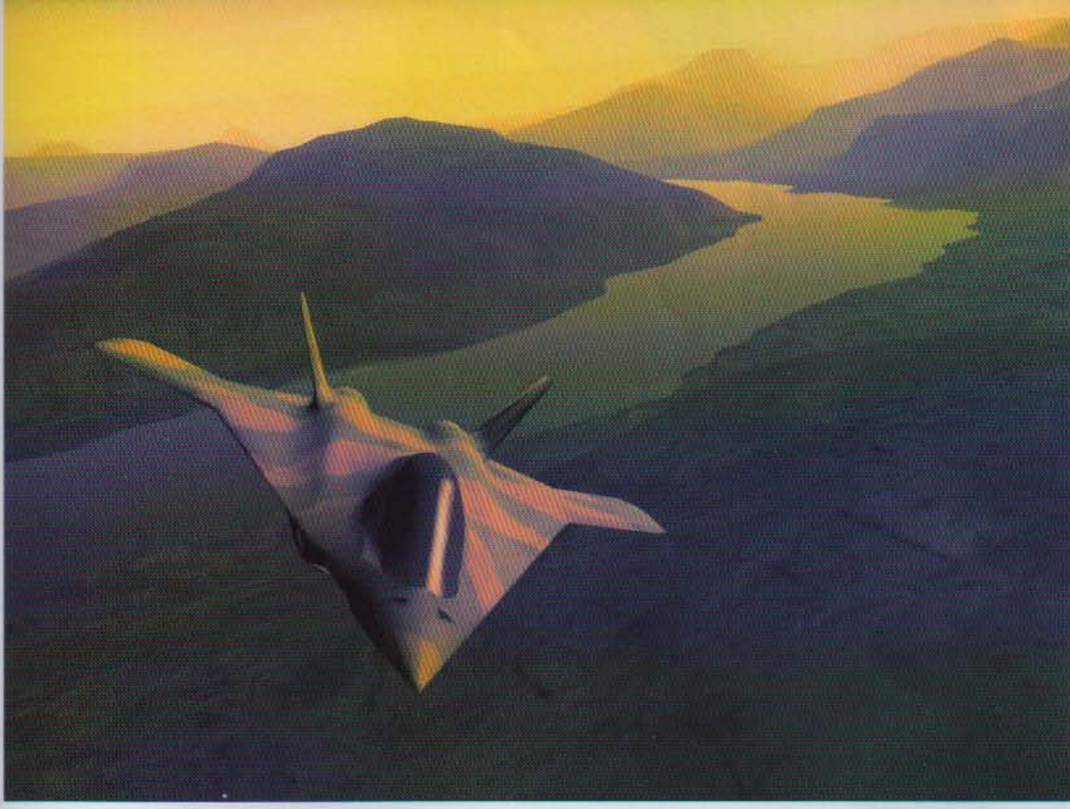
Think tank

"There are two schools of thought on simulations in the military," says Birch. "The first is to build a simulator that does everything. These type of simulators are expensive to develop and once built cost so much the RAF can only afford a couple of the simulators. The second school of thought is to use part-task training, which teaches the elements of a particular function." Using part-task simulations such as DID's laser-guided bombing simulation could replace much of the need for big-budget simulations from the traditional military contractors, believes Birch.

"The part-task simulations can deliver 90 per cent of the capability of the big budget simulators but are just ten per cent of the cost," notes Birch. "Some of the graphic engines out there are as good as those on offer in a big budget simulation, I expect you can buy it in the high street and use it on a £500 PC."

Bickerstaff, who helped DID during the development of *EF2000*, however, believes the larger contractors still offer more. "I don't see videogame developers entering

"Working with the military was killing a lot of the gaming culture in the company with the amount of paperwork involved"



BAE Systems' Warton-based simulation department uses software to help build new aircraft such as this Future Offensive Air System (FOAS) aircraft that was part of a series of future aircraft concept studies done by the military contractor. Just one of the ways in which videogame entertainment is influencing the next-generation of war machines

the military market as a threat, far from it. It's a different approach," argues Bickerstaff. "The military stuff videogame developers are creating using PC-based technology is usually quite narrow and concentrates on small tasks such as firing weapons. Now that is a really good way of training someone about that task. However we're making simulations with 360-degree view, that produce realtime imagery at 60Hz, generate terrain on the fly and so on," he adds.

Red tape

Despite the fast vanishing technology gap between the military contractors and games industry, developers who've ventured into the military market are cautious about getting too involved. "The army moves to a different drumbeat to the games industry," says Kenwright. "There's a lot of politics we had to get through to work with the military and in the end it became a distraction and was killing a lot of the gaming culture in the company with the amount of paperwork and approval processes involved."

Mascall admits that Digital Integration at one point considered becoming a full-time contractor for the military but ruled out such a move as "the military was unlikely to develop contracts that would fit us due to the way the procurement process worked." Money is also an issue. "There's a lot more money in games than there is in doing simulations for the military," notes Kenwright.

Some developers are more willing to explore the opportunity. "If the development work is there and the right people are involved then it's a possibility," says Daniels of Maverick's position. Others have gone further and abandoned games for a military lifestyle. Californian firm Visual Purple currently produces game-like training tools for organisations such as the FBI and US Navy, but it began life as a games developer called Tsunami Media.

"Visual Purple grew out of Tsunami Media after it was offered the chance to do some work for the US government on the back of its game *Silent Steel*, which was a interactive movie where the player captains a submarine," explains **John Jarrett**, vice-president of appliance at Visual Purple. "One of our concerns was that a games company might not be taken seriously by



DIVE (Dismounted Infantry Virtual Environment) is the customised version of *Half-Life* currently used by the MoD to research the tactical implication of new weaponry. But do the instant death, quicksave features still remain?

Uncle Sam goes digital

The days of Uncle Sam posters may well be over for US citizens. While the behatted and goateed Uncle Sam may have made the grade in the past, the use of computer technology is now seen as a more effective way of getting American youth to join the army.

To this end, the summer saw the US Army make its first steps into the videogame publishing arena with the release of *America's Army* – part FPS, part RPG. Yet despite having spent a reported $6–7m of US taxpayers' money on the PC game the army has decided to distribute the game as freeware, making it available on magazine cover disks and available for download at http://www.americasarmy.com

The game is composed of two parts. The first is a FPS which uses various scenarios to inform players of basic aspects of the army and give them a feel for basic training. In comparison, the second part, which is based on role-playing games, is more overt in its attempts at pushing the army's message with edutainment-like bids at briefing players in the army life, both on and off duty.

Judging by the game's website, the first instalment of the game, published in July, has already proved a massive hit, with well over 100,000 postings having been made. In the build-up to release, however, the US army has made some bold claims about its game which only served to highlight how new the armed force is to the world of videogames. One of the claims is that the game is "the only game to link experiences across two entirely different game genres." The other claim is that it is "the only game reviewed by army subject matter experts for realism." Given the widespread cross-genre fertilisation in commercial videogames and the long standing use of military advice during game development, neither of these claims stand up.

A further claim is that the game's role-playing component offers an experience where "an infinite number of dramatised story paths unfold, based on a unique realtime assembly of storyline by the patented story engine." For gamers who've had years of game publisher propaganda about infinite polygon engines and total gameplay freedom, this statement is somewhat hard to swallow.

From the US army's point of view though, the game is about persuading America's youth to sign up and the rush to download copies of the game's first instalment certainly confirms a strong interest from the public – both in America and beyond. But whether giving out a commercial quality game for free is enough to have any impact on the long-term decline in new recruits joining the US army, a problem that has dogged the organisation since Vietnam, remains open to question.





In 1998 *Spearhead* became the new *Battlezone*. Just like Atari, MÄK Technologies was asked by the US army to adapt its 'fun' simulation into something which would train the next generation of tank operators to be more tactically aware

Doom (PC)

Id's seminal firstperson shooter had a high profile but brief impact on the US army when the marines developed a mod that they hoped would help train its troops. However, things didn't pan out and *Marine Doom*, which replaced demons from Hell with soldiers, failed to cut the training mustard.



World Rally Championship (PlayStation2)

Not the obvious candidate for military involvement but this PlayStation2 game's terrain generation methods are the by-products of developer Evolution Studios' past involvement in working with the military. Such is the superiority of the game's engine to its military forerunner that the armed forces are now interested in using the latest version.



Virtua Fighter (Arcade)

The original arcade incarnation of Sega's flagship fighting game relied on hardware Sega co-developed with military contractors Lockheed Martin. Sega's Model 3 arcade machines, which also carried the likes of *Daytona USA*, was the result of a mid-'90s deal with the military heavyweight.



Battlezone (Arcade)

It might not have fitted Atari's early '80s San Francisco hippy image but when the US army asked the firm to produce a souped up version of their wireframe 3D arcade game *Battlezone* in the early '80s Atari's bosses were happy to oblige. Despite the high profile nature of the deal, many believe that few soldiers benefited from its conversion into a military training tool.



Creatures (PC)

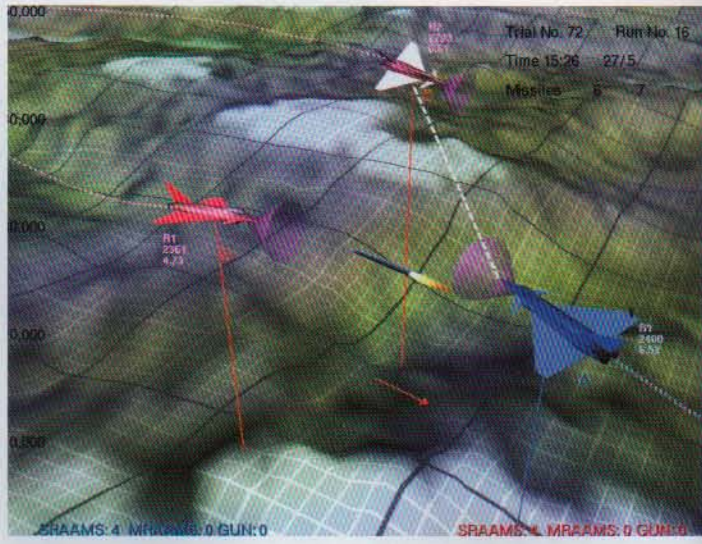
They may look cute but at one point the MoD was looking to enlist the artificial intelligence lurking behind them to control unmanned combat air vehicles. Yes, really. Little progress was made and eventually the work and the project was abandoned.



Spearhead 1 & 2 (PC)

This 1998 tank simulation proved successful enough with the US army for developers MÄK Technologies to be asked to create a sequel more geared towards the army's requirements, assisting them in heightening their operators' tactical awareness.





Despite the rush towards realism in war-based videogames, the military may find an abstract image such as this one from a BAE Systems simulator more useful thanks to the emphasis on clarity rather than detail

the government and military so we set up Visual Purple as a separate entity."

While the military's work in providing technology, inspiration, information and guidance to the games industry has had a clear effect on games – especially simulations – what impact the use of games will have on the nature of the military is less clear. Morris feels the impact of virtual research tools like those he is using *Half-Life* for will have wide-reaching effects. "I think it could have a profound impact on the future as it could affect what new equipment is taken up by the military and should make it easier to identify problems with new technology earlier in the procurement process," he says.

Kenwright believes game-like simulations are likely to play a vital role as unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) start being adopted. "The focus for the next generation of planes is for them not to be manned which deepens the links with videogames as the next generation of pilots will work from bunkers using simulations," he suggests. "We're moving towards hyperwars. Whereas in the past wars took place over years and months they will increasingly take place over days and hours using smart AI in UAVs."

Kenwright's vision of UAVs does hold some weight, as back in 1998 Creature Labs (creators of the artificial life sim *Creatures*) was working with the MoD to develop AI UAVs, although this project eventually came to nothing. Bickerstaff also believes simulations will play a key role in the use of UAVs. "It's an area that is difficult for us to talk about as we are involved in the development of these craft. But simulations could also be used to create imagery as seen by UAV," says Bickerstaff. "This imagery does not have to use the visual spectrum you might get from putting a camera on a UAV but could use feeds from sensors to create a more abstract image. We could produce very realistic graphics in such a simulator but for those on the ground it could be more useful to have visualisation displays that provide less cluttered abstract representations."

Couple these predictions with the US military's decision to start publishing games and it is clear the influence of videogames is only set to grow. What emerges in the long term from this strengthening relationship is harder to pinpoint but, on paper, videogames have the potential to change the very nature of warfare itself. A disturbing thought.

"On paper, videogames have the potential to change the very nature of warfare itself"

The puzzle king

Two years ago city management consultant, **Nalin Sharma**, won an **Edge** competition searching for new game development talent. His entry, at the time called *Cubic Juggler* (now re-titled *ZooCube* – see p92 for a review), was a fast-paced puzzler, mixing the tidy 'em up gameplay of *Tetris* with classic kiddie card game 'Pairs'. The prize was a stall at top Cannes-style industry event Milia – a chance to showcase his talent to the publishing world. The rest is the kind of 'bedroom coder makes good' story we'd given up on ever hearing again...



Audience with

Nalin Sharma

director, Puzzlekings



ZooCube was a return to the videogame industry for you, rather than a beginning. How did you first become involved in game development?

I did a *Scramble* clone about 20 years ago, called *Scram 20*, for the Vic 20. I was 16 at the time. I'd just been to the arcade, saw the game and thought it would be great if I could do something like that. So I read a description of it in a book about videogames, this was when games were first getting really big, and wrote the game based on that description.

Was that game published?

I sold it to a magazine and eventually it was picked up by Artic Computing, and they published it on the Vic 20. I didn't make much money out of it but slightly more than I would have done selling cassettes from home. Then I did a music synthesiser for Quicksilva, and that's when I first met Rod Cousens (now CEO at Acclaim) – that was in '83. Then I had a year off, went to university, and did the Atari ST conversion of *Super Sprint* between the second and third year. Actually, I did write one other game, a budget puzzle game called *Collapse* in 1985 between A levels and university. I was trying to do the same kind of thing as *ZooCube* – an original puzzle game.

So after university you went to work in the city as a management consultant. How did you get the idea for *ZooCube* in that sort of environment?

I started reading books about innovation and creativity. My thinking was, well, why aren't there any new ideas in games, or why are there so few that seem to work. There was a quote in **Edge** a few years back by Eugene Jarvis who said all the prime real-estate had been taken up, and that all the games that could be made, had been made. I didn't really agree with that. I did a whole bunch of research into how you come up with ideas, how you develop the right side – the creative side – of your brain, etc.

So you took quite a psychological approach, rather than looking at other games?

Yes, the first step was finding out how to become creative, and the second part was training myself to become a bit more reflective and to not think so linearly. And it's hard as a programmer to try and do that. I also taught myself how to draw and having learned that I started playing around with ideas, and looking into how you come up with new things.

Then about eight years ago, I broke my leg playing football, and it must have been some of the drugs I was on or something, but I came up with this neat idea, that kind of re-ignited my enthusiasm for games. I spent two years on that, but it turned out to be too difficult for me at the time, so then I came up with another idea called *Cubic Juggler*.

"I broke my leg playing football, and it must have been some of the drugs I was on or something, but I came up with this neat idea"

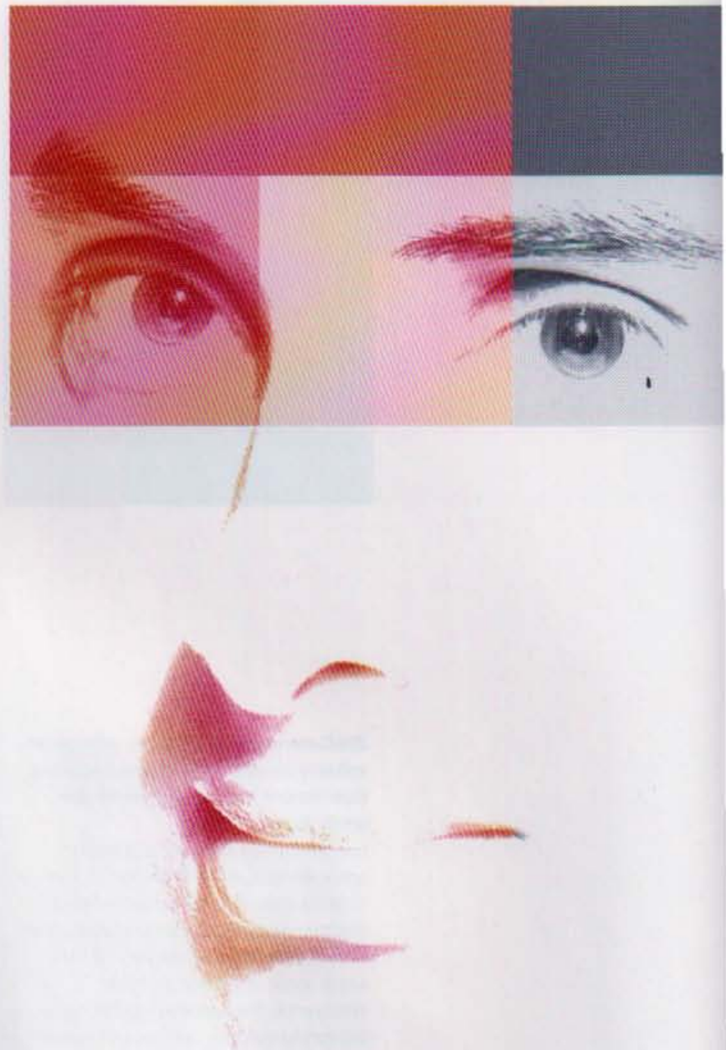
The thinking behind this was, how would an entity live in 3D space if it were being continually bombarded by objects. So I started doing a few sketches and stuff, and thought, what sort of things might be coming at you, and I started to think about shapes. Then the basic idea of shape matching came into my head and probably the most exciting moment was when I thought let's prototype it and try it all out. And it became a hobby, I just kept building it and refining it for three or four years, getting people to criticise it.

When you entered the Edge competition was that a conscious effort to get back into the industry?

To be quite honest I always thought I had a good chance of winning, but I never expected to make any money out of it. When I showed the game at Milia people were saying well it's a great bit of shareware or maybe we could use it as a giveaway product. I thought well, it's great to be here, wouldn't it be great if it could last. You know, working in the city, with a family, a couple of kids, I had responsibilities, it's not like I could just leave everything and go away and pursue something – I'm not 21. But it just built from there.

Was there one thing that happened at Milia that made you think there could be something in this?

Well, I had two CEOs including Rod who were interested in the game and also I met up with John Cook (a veteran industry agent, representing the likes of Geoff Crammond) who said he was just blown away by the game. I mean that was the first time I showed anyone the game in its final finished state. What we have now is a lot more polished in terms of music and graphics and sound, but the underlying gameplay is the same. My memory of the week was that I was completely exhausted but I enjoyed myself, showing the game, talking to people, I didn't know what it would lead to.



So was Acclaim the first company to approach you after Milia?
Yeah, basically we continued talking to Acclaim, but actually putting a deal together takes a fairly long time, and we talked to other publishers as well – there were lots of other publishers that were interested and which came round to see the game. But it was difficult, during what was a transition year for the industry, 2000–2001, to get people interested. And it's always tough to sell an original game.

That's why it took about 18 months to get signed. I sat down with a publisher nearly two years ago and he said to me, "Congratulations you've got an absolutely fantastic game, I really enjoyed playing it, but we don't know what to do with it." That wasn't an isolated incident. It takes a bit of imagination and vision and fortunately that's what Acclaim had, it – and particularly Rod Cousens – had the balls to back it and that's how I ended up with Acclaim.

Were the publishers that you went to see expecting a whole development studio? What sort of effect do you think it had when you turned up alone?
I think sometimes you have to come across as though you're representing a big company, because it gives you more credibility. Having said that, what counted for me was, firstly, the game had won an award already and, secondly, it was actually a core product that I could give them and they could play with.

Do you think we'll see a rise in innovative games like *ZooCube* now that next-gen platforms have levelled the graphical playing field?
I would hope that's the case but having just come back from E3, I think its going to be difficult. Even talking to Acclaim itself, Acclaim is looking at what's happening in the industry and everybody wants to plan licences, everyone wants to see titles that they know they can put in their spreadsheets that can sell a million copies. Even if that means they have to spend more upfront.

I'd love to see more innovative games, and I hope that there are, but if you look at the industry, there are very few companies that are doing that. Sega is doing it and a few of the other Japanese publishers, but it's going to be quite hard until developers are given more power in terms of being able to make decisions. At the moment you've got presidents and marketing people making decisions about games which they're entitled to do, but at the end of the day, what kind of game would you rather play – is it a game that's got a lot of soul in it, that's been developed by people who have put their heart into it, or something that's been managed by marketing people?

"I sat down with a publisher and he said to me, 'Congratulations you've got a fantastic game, I really enjoyed playing it, but we don't know what to do with it.'"

What skills do you think you have that maybe young graduates entering the industry might not have?
It's a great background to be able to say, yes, I've shipped product. But I'd say the biggest thing counting in my favour was working in the city, in a professional environment, being used to working to budgets, managing people, dealing with people at a very senior level. I think that's what counted in my favour more than the programming. I couldn't have remote managed two teams, put the whole thing together, liaised with the middleware companies [Sharma used Intrinsic's new package Alchemy in the development of *ZooCube* on the GameCube], got the whole thing finished within the deadline and within the budget without that experience. I mean a GameCube title within seven months is pretty amazing. However, the programming experience also allows me to talk through problems with the developers – if I was just a straightforward marketing person I wouldn't be able to do that.

With *ZooCube*, you actually handed over the development responsibilities to two companies – Coyote handled the GameCube version and Graphic State the GBA version. So really, you – as designer, producer and managing director – are the only employee of PuzzleKings. How did this model of the 'virtual studio' come about?
It was partly out of neccessity and partly… it just kind of fell into place. We started to deal with Acclaim and obviously we had a deadline, and I had a choice of setting up a development studio, or sub-contracting out. So after discussion with my agent, John Cook, we decided the quickest way would be to get two other studios involved. After that, it was really about hunting around for the expertise on GBA and on GameCube. But also I was thinking about what I actually wanted to do – do I want to be managing a team of developers, or do I want to focus on the ideas and coming up with new things? And for me it was the latter. I'd like to continue with this model. I don't have to worry about developers from day to day. Hopefully it's good for everybody.

Do you think this could take off throughout the industry?
There are definitely positive advantages. My producer in the US would normally have to keep coming over and managing the development team, but in this case, because I'm kind of doing that, it frees up his role, so he hasn't had to get involved as with other projects. This removes the burden from the publisher. Obviously the producer gives me input and comes up with ideas, but I'm making the design decisions.

Do you think there are still solo programmers out there who are trying to do the same thing as you?
Well, I kept reading about bedroom coding being dead, and I was thinking, 'Hey, hang on a second, I've just written a game out of my bedroom and then set up a virtual company.' I did meet someone at the Beeson Gregory Games Conference [a regular venture capital meet-up] who was trying to put a virtual studio together – a very small team – but they were having problems getting a publisher to buy into them. But if you're a new developer you're going to have problems with credibility, whatever, it doesn't matter how you approach it.

What's the most difficult element of designing a puzzle game?
The hardest thing is coming up with a new idea in the first place. There is no limit to the number of new ideas you can create, but it's finding the balance of providing longevity for gamers but also appealing to a wider audience, people who don't normally play videogames.

You want to try and broaden the market – if the industry's going to expand and have a bigger future, you want people who don't normally play games. And those people are more receptive to innovation. They'll look at a new firstperson shooter or racing game and think its pretty much the same as the previous version, but if they look at something new, they haven't quite seen before…

It's like when they designed 'The Simpsons' they changed the colours of all the characters to bright yellow, the reason being that there are hundreds of channels in the US so when people are flicking through, they'll see something they haven't seen before – it drew them in. That's what we're trying to do.

So have you shown the game to lots of your old city colleagues?
Yeah and the response has been mostly very positive. Acclaim also showed the game at the 6th Annual Video Game Software Exhibition held in Washington [an event where American publishers show new games to political figures in order to create a better understanding between the games industry and Capitol Hill]. Nintendo was there, Sony, Electronic Arts, everybody else, and what Acclaim told me was that *ZooCube* was the most popular game because people could just pick it up and play it, they didn't have to sit down and read a manual.

What are the major influences on the gameplay?
I think the major ones are the arcade games of the past. *Pac-Man*, *Defender*, *Galaga*: games that you could play for ten minutes and get a real buzz from. For me it's the emotions they create, the way they get your heart pumping, the panic that sets in. It's very concentrated.

Do you think that Acclaim's decision to fund a comparatively low-budget game, might persuade others to risk money on innovative, inexpensive projects?
It's very difficult to get anything original off the ground. I mean, if you take a company such as EA, it had a $1.7bn turnover last year, but how many original games did it come up with? It's based on a business model where it wants the same sequels year in year out. But one would have thought that such a large company should have some kind of a responsibility to grow the industry.

I feel that the whole business model has got to change somewhat. Maybe in five or six years when you've got online distribution, this will provide another mechanism for publishers to be able to try new stuff and see what's popular – a bit like an advanced version of the demo disks you get on the front of magazines. The whole retail cycle might change when everyone's online.

So what's next for PuzzleKings?
Well, I want to concentrate on high-adrenaline puzzle games. I've got probably three or four ideas and I want to have at least two prototypes by the end of the year. The first step is to get *ZooCube* on other formats, to consolidate that title. But we need to take a bit of time to reflect on the last year or so because it's been a bit of a rollercoaster.

"I kept reading about bedroom coding being dead, and I was thinking, 'Hey, hang on a second, I've just written a game out of my bedroom and set up a virtual company.'"

Has Acclaim discussed any other projects with you?
We're talking about a few things relating to *ZooCube*. I think partly it depends on how it sells because it's a new title for them. Acclaim wants to be sure, before committing, it wants to measure the risk. But we won two awards at E3, the reviews have been good so far, so yeah we're talking.



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing; one: disastrous; two: appalling; three: severely flawed; four: disappointing; five: average; six: competent; seven: distinguished; eight: excellent; nine: astounding; ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding

While landing tricks is fussy, that just makes it all the more rewarding when you get it right. There are few better chill out games, and none better on the Xbox.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Beach Spikers

Arriving alongside Mario *Sunshine*, there was only space this month for the plumber. Sega's beach beauties are compulsive, though: review in **E**115.



(GameCube) Sega

Frequency

Sometimes the patterns get too much, but if you've hit the point of frustration, persevere. Eventually the game submits, and then comes hypnosis.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Super Mario Sunshine

What else? Read the review, then buy the game, then experience Dolphic Island for yourself. Expect it to remain here for a few months yet. Maybe longer.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Great expectations

Why **Edge** won't spoil the party...

Picture it: the planning meeting for issue 114, and **Edge** is deciding what to put on the cover. There is no question, really. It has to be *Sunshine*. That's what everyone's talking about. That's what everyone's interested in. But the question comes up: what if it's not so good? What if the game turns up, **Edge** reviews it, and it's nothing more than a disappointment? A six, or a five, or... Nintendo fans feel faint. It doesn't bear thinking about.

Relax. If you can bet on one thing in videogame magazines, it's that a Miyamoto Mario work is worthy of a cover story. Even if it was average-to-awful, that's a story in itself, but it's not, and **Edge** is confident of that. All games in the testscreen section are tested thoroughly, and Mario's examination was no exception. Sleep was lost. Meals were skipped. Because reviews are something **Edge** has to get right: as well as defining the magazine's integrity, they're critical analysis of something that others have worked on for a long time. And they're about spending other people's money. Spending your money. **Edge** has to get it right.

That said, the buyers' guide principle doesn't quite follow for *Super Mario Sunshine*. The simple fact is that, regardless of what **Edge** says over the next four pages, the decision to purchase is, for most people, already made. The series' heritage sees to that: *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Super Mario World*, and *Super Mario 64* were all stunning at the time of release, and all hold up to extended play today. Past success isn't necessarily an indication of future performance, but to not want to experience the next in the series – to find out just how good it is – makes you wilfully perverse. And the fact that everyone's going to play this game makes one aspect of the review more crucial than ever.

No spoilers. There are many things **Edge** could have detailed in its appraisal of the game, but chose not to. It would have been easy to give a list of the tasks, reveal every element of the water play, the secrets and surprises. But everyone who plays *Mario Sunshine* – and that should be, will be, everyone who reads this who already has a GameCube and a number of people currently without – should have the pleasure of discovering those things for themselves. In the end, that's what's worth losing sleep over.











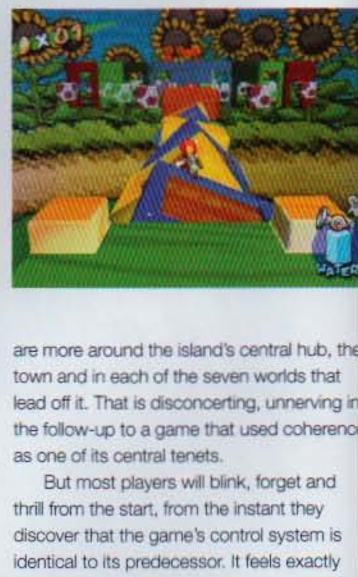
Super Mario Sunshine

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), September 27 (UK)**



Fast, smooth, and technically excellent, the rollercoaster sub-game is exactly the sort of thing you'd expect a next-generation *Mario* to provide. But it's also oddly flawed – the restrictive fixed camera and lack of crosshair makes aiming more of a trial than it should be, and removes some of the fun from an excellent set-piece





So, six years. Six years in which to twist and skip around Bob-omb Battlefield, to climb Tall Tall Mountain, to wonder if a game has ever done sensory Christmas better than Cool Cool Mountain. Six years to marvel at the ingenuity of Tiny-Huge Island and Wet-Dry world. Six years in which to dive for coins in Jolly Roger Bay. Six years in which to fly.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of *Super Mario Sunshine*. Not just because it's such a key release for the GameCube – brand values, character recognition, guaranteed sales and so on – but because it's the follow-up to one of the greatest games of all time. Of all time. Six years and everything drowns in hyperbole, but *Super Mario 64* can claim greatness quietly, and few will argue. "The world of videogaming has just changed forever," **Edge** said, breathlessly. "Ten."

Perfection? Not quite, but so far above everything else, and not just dimensionally. *Mario 64*'s unparalleled critical reception was never purely about a shift into 3D, but about level design genius and a peerless system of control. There was always somewhere to go, always something to do; levels thrilled and baffled in equal measure; there were tiny, polished touches that you might not discover for days, months, years. So lucid and solid, too. No obvious invisible walls.

Sunshine begins on an island, and the island is surrounded by invisible walls. There are more around the island's central hub, the town and in each of the seven worlds that lead off it. That is disconcerting, unnerving in the follow-up to a game that used coherence as one of its central tenets.

But most players will blink, forget and thrill from the start, from the instant they discover that the game's control system is identical to its predecessor. It feels exactly the same; it is (superficially) structurally identical; it looks like *SM64* coded for '02. The plot requires you to clean graffiti and locate 'shines', the *Sunshine* equivalent of stars. Each of the seven thematic worlds contains eight stories, and exists in eight fractionally different iterations. While this means that *Sunshine* is smaller in terms of territory, because the worlds conceal more objectives it will take players as long, if not longer, to thoroughly complete. But it is more

There is much climbing, jumping and – inevitably – falling in *Sunshine*, and sometimes the game is as frustrating as that implies

Previously in E112, E113









High vantage points provide stunning views of the levels, with little slowdown. Criticisms of texture quality are perhaps missing the point; the game is set in Mario's world, and the simplistic style suits the nursery rhyme theme perfectly





Water effects, while not as overtly stunning as *WaveRace*, are sumptuous. Several levels include cabling to walk across and bounce upon, and combing them with the waterpack allows Mario to cross huge gaps

repetitive, and one of the delights of *Mario 64* was exploring new zones for the first time. That delight is halved here.

Stop. So much negativity. Perhaps it needs stating now, before the review goes further and the brightness you've expected clouds over with doubt, that *Super Mario Sunshine* is a great piece of work, up there with some of the best Nintendo games. Expectations could not be higher and, at times, *Sunshine* falls considerably short of them. But again: expectations could not be higher. For it to meet them would be a monumental achievement, and that it falls short comes down to flaws that sit so awkwardly with the rest of the sublime, blissful experience.

Small flaws, sometimes. For example: you defeat a boss, and his death throes knock you through the floor into the skybox. Or the level tasks loop just that fraction more than you'd like. Or the clipping isn't quite there, and you fall through the floor of a pirate ship, waddle through solid scenery. Or the game crashes, dead, stop. Only once, mind, in so much play time. Once is one time too many, but… small flaws. Almost forgivable. Utterly unexpected from Nintendo.

Or bigger issues. The camera is now entirely on the C-stick, and requires much input from the player. It's a case of progress getting in the way of progress, if you will; the dual analogue nature of the GameCube controller permits this method of control, which means most of the time the camera plays dumb. Although there is no Lakitu, its behaviour is that of a solid object, but there are still points where the viewpoint contrives to disappear behind walls and retrieving it can be a clumsy business. A neat shadowing effect means you're always aware of where Mario is, even when he's obscured, but that's missing the point somewhat – when all you can see is a wall, you're not worried about where Mario is. You're concerned about the edge of the cliff he's about to fall off.

The game's central innovation, Mario's water-filled backpack, alleviates that fear of falling somewhat, as directing the water pressure at the floor allows the player a short period of hovering grace. That you're only seriously aware of that ability when you lose it is testament to how well integrated into the mechanic it is, and gaining proficiency with it and the horizontal spraying is a joy. In both cases, squirting is assigned to the pressure-sensitive left trigger; pushing the trigger all the way back locks Mario into position, and the movement on the analogue stick becomes directional control of the water jet. That's perfect, brilliant design. It's what everyone expected.

Aside from hovering, the most basic use of the jet is cleaning graffiti and washing away filthy enemies. It has a strong obsessive compulsive appeal, and discovering the other uses for the jet stream provides some of *Sunshine*'s best moments. The replacement for *SM64*'s cap power-ups are also based on the backpack, different nozzles on your water



Perfect blue

In *Mario 64*, one blue coin was worth five yellow ones. Here, they're far more more valuable, because ten of them can be traded in for a shine. Hence those who wish to perfectly complete *Super Mario Sunshine* will have to find all the blue coins first, and with many hidden in fiendishly obscure places – check every blind alley, spray every piece of flora and fauna – that's sure to take a while. Although sometimes the coin locations could be perceived as slightly too obtuse, it's an ideal subquest to undertake between deaths on later levels.



Sunshine features a great deal of new friends and enemies, but it's the old favourites that'll delight most gamers. Nostalgic pleasure is an advantage Mario has over most platformers, and it helps considerably

pack which, like the caps, open up previously inaccessible areas of worlds. The thrusting ability has another, perhaps unintentional effect on the level design, too, in that it forces the zones to be wider, more open, and more vertical. There is much climbing, jumping, and – inevitably – falling in *Sunshine*, and sometimes the game is as frustrating as that implies. The fault is nearly always yours,

Everyone was waiting for Nintendo's guiding light, and it arrives, and it's far above its imitators, but it's some way below its inspiration

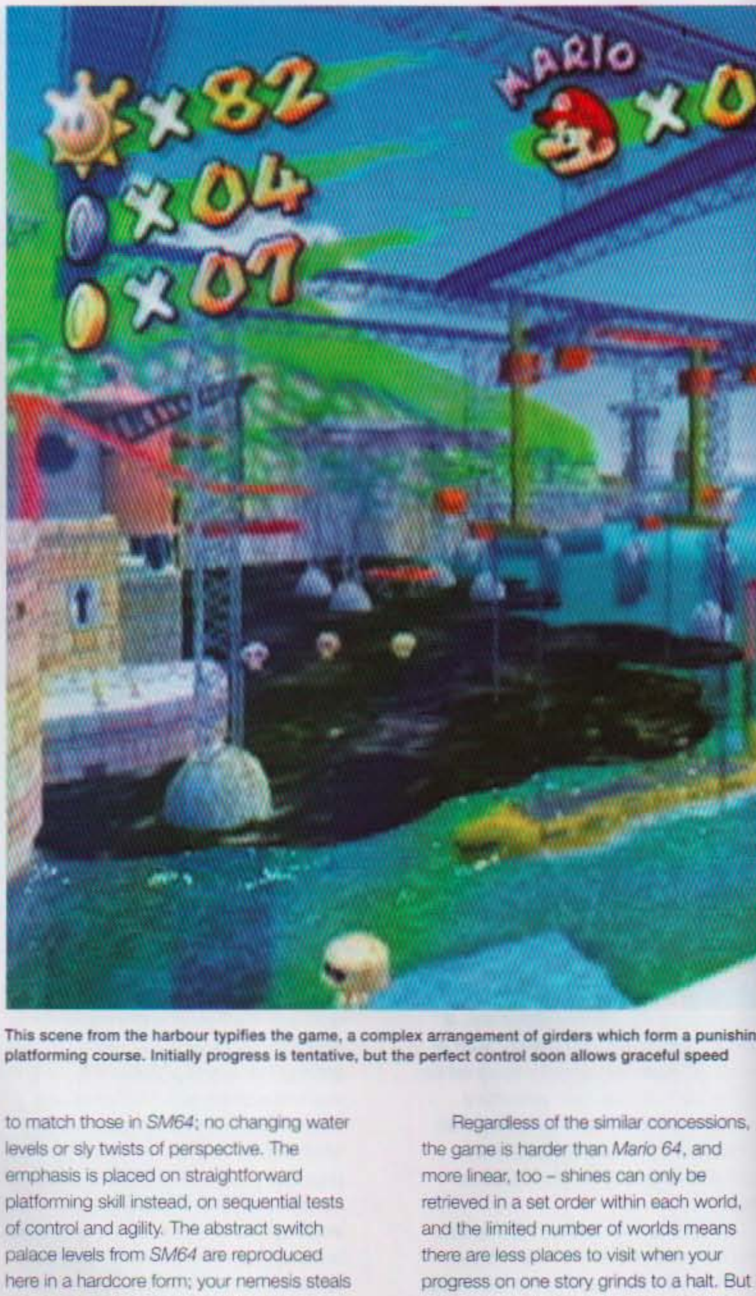


The grid climbing from *Super Mario World* makes a welcome reappearance, although it's not entirely free from camera problems

though; the beautiful, inertial control of *SM64* remains intact, and everything, right up to the sickening moment you fall, is a joy.

But perhaps it's not quite joyous enough. We've had six years to fly, and to have those natural, soaring aerobatics replaced with something so mechanical feels unfair. Brutally, as fun as the thrusting is, it doesn't feel magical. Combine that with the bastardisation of the swimming system, which no longer offers full floating freedom but requires you to press one button to move forward and down, and another for forward and up, there's a perceptible loss of freedom.

And of intelligence, too, since the search for shines shows no real touches of cunning



This scene from the harbour typifies the game, a complex arrangement of girders which form a punishing platforming course. Initially progress is tentative, but the perfect control soon allows graceful speed

to match those in *SM64*; no changing water levels or sly twists of perspective. The emphasis is placed on straightforward platforming skill instead, on sequential tests of control and agility. The abstract switch palace levels from *SM64* are reproduced here in a hardcore form; your nemesis steals your waterpack on ten separate occasions, and asks you to perform a series of increasingly ludicrous jumps across spinning, flipping, and dissolving platforms. There is a fine line between entertainment and irritation, and, just occasionally, *Sunshine* falls on the wrong side of it. On most of those it eases the pain with easily accessible extra lives, just like its predecessors.

Regardless of the similar concessions, the game is harder than *Mario 64*, and more linear, too – shines can only be retrieved in a set order within each world, and the limited number of worlds means there are less places to visit when your progress on one story grinds to a halt. But there are primitive object-oriented tasks dotted around the hub, and blue coins strewn all over the island, and, despite the invisible walls and glimpses of imperfection, always pleasure in wandering, just exploring and revelling in the control. Exactly like *Mario 64*, then, and all fans ever wanted wa a sequel. They've finally got an expansion pack. They've waited a while.



The worlds are all tropical, naturally, and pleasantly diverse. No slippy-slidey ice world, then. For shame

Six years, in fact. It's startling, really. Developers have had six years to build on *SM64*, and they have failed to do anything but create shadows. Everyone was waiting for Nintendo's guiding light, and it arrives, and it's far above its imitators, but it's some way below its inspiration. *Super Mario Sunshine* doesn't score *SM64*'s ten; not because it's a sequel, and not because it fails to emulate the dimensional shift, but because, shine for star and star for shine, it's not as good. It's not going to change videogaming; it's the second best platform game of all time. *Of all time*. Celebrate that.

Edge rating: **Nine** out of ten



It might not be a ten, but that doesn't stop there from being some wonderful touches. It's not like Mario to bitch, but the chain chomp here, last seen in *Mario 64*, has a lime green X carved into his head. And is it really coincidence that the graffiti chase challenges have you eliminating crosses, circles and triangles?

Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

Format: GameCube Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Silicon Knights Price: $50 (£34) Release: Out now (US), TBC (UK)



The weird Trapper creatures transport you to the strange phase world shown above where energy can be recovered

It's ironic that such an interesting and inventive game comes along just as **Edge** exposes the grim reality of money-hungry publishers looking to cash in on the latest licensing craze (**E**113, p79). In terms of structure alone, *Eternal Darkness* is like nothing you've experienced before. Bold, ingenious and (clearly, given the delays) resource heavy, the narrative of this title spans centuries and allows you to assume the role of 12 individuals, each with different weapons and abilities.

Eternal Darkness may be a more ingenious title than Capcom's Biohazard on GameCube, but it's certainly not as terrifying or polished

But it's not just the number of characters that really impresses, it's the way they are successfully integrated into the game. Beginning in the traditional haunted mansion locale, *Eternal Darkness* initially appears to slavishly follow the tropes established by the *Alone in the Dark* and *Biohazard* games. However, there are wonderful moments which call attention to and gently mock the genre (see Do not adjust your set). It's only a pity that swinging-scythe traps make an appearance to undermine the cleverness evident elsewhere.



The game's creatures, or 'Ancients' are based on Lovecraft's 'The Old Ones'. The sight of one of these hideous monsters will reduce your sanity, but a killing blow will redress the balance

After encountering the body of her grandfather in his stately home, Alex Roivas finds herself embroiled in the mystery surrounding the 'Tome of Eternal Darkness'. The mansion provides the hub location from which the other adventures develop. Searching the house will uncover chapters of the book which then propel the player back through time to embody a character who has become a part of the book's very fabric. Based heavily on the Lovecraft mythos, the plot is typically overwrought, but at least it does provide a fitting premise to showcase such disparate stories.

The pacing in *Eternal Darkness* is particularly good. Each chapter takes about one hour to complete and unlike similar adventure games you never feel fatigued by the experience. Just as you are becoming accustomed to the setting and character a new chapter opens up providing new puzzles and possibilities. Indeed, when a chapter closes and the narrative returns to the present day, a souvenir will also return, 'Mr Benn'-style, to allow further access to areas of the Roivas house.

Although *Eternal Darkness* delivers the usual gem collecting and sliding panel puzzles, it's arguably a more 'friendly' game environment to navigate than Capcom's *Biohazard* series. There's no agonising over how much ammunition you've used (a secondary slashing weapon is always available), all objects found can be carried in the inventory and a save game can be made whenever danger has abated. Although such aspects are often a matter of taste, *Eternal Darkness* never travels into the realms of frustration.

Sadly, Silicon Knight's game can also be clumsy. The combat is marred by poor camera angles that sometimes leave the player battling enemies offscreen. A 'finishing' command is equally troublesome, causing the character to go through a lengthy animated sequence and thus leaving him or her exposed to further attacks. *Eternal Darkness* may be a more ingenious title than Capcom's *Biohazard* on GameCube, but it's certainly not as terrifying or polished.

Regardless, Silicon Knights' has pushed a tired genre a little further forward and its perseverance has produced one of the most structurally inventive game's you are likely to experience in a long, long time.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

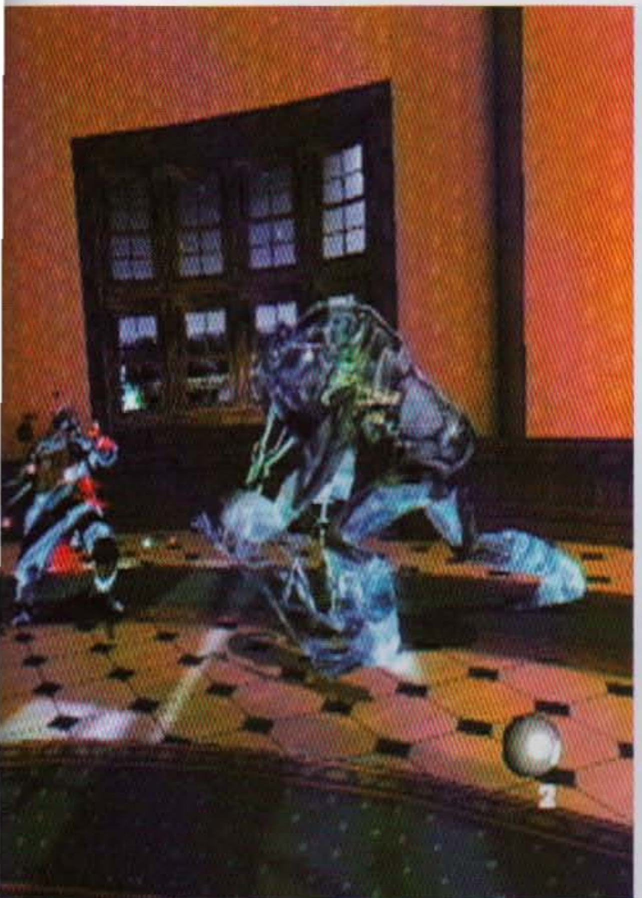






Torches are particularly useful to light the way ahead, but they lack efficacy against monsters. Best change to a slashing weapon

Previously in E73, E86, E99, E104, E112











Once runestones are collected spells can be cast. Different combinations of runes will produce new 'magick'. Spells include Enchant Item, Reveal Invisible and Recover (health)







Eternal Darkness uses a targeting system that is novel but clumsy. The highlighted area of a monster can be altered by pressing down the R button and moving the analogue stick. Against shambling bosses, which often move out of camera shot, the process is cumbersome. On a more positive note, the Pro Logic II track is great

Do not adjust your set

One of the more novel design elements in the game is the sanity meter. Every time a diabolical enemy is encountered the meter will fall, though lost sanity can be regained by executing a finishing move on the creature. If the meter plummets, strange and unnerving effects begin to take place. Camera angles shift and flashbacks occur, even putting the player in a location previously explored, if only for a brief moment. But the fun really begins when the sanity meter hits rock bottom. **Edge** does not want to give too much away. Let's just say that it's not a good idea to believe every message that appears onscreen. Checking to see that your control pad is connected, just when a horde of undead attack is a truly terrifying experience.

Medieval Total War

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Creative Assembly** Price: **£40** Release: **August 30**







The importance of shipping and ports has been considerably expanded (centre). Trade routes allow easy army deployment

For a game about Kingship and the oppression of the masses for the greater glory of God – and your own coffers, naturally – there's something suitably regal about the second game in Creative Assembly's *Total War* series: Regal bordering on *imperious arrogance*. While a considerable proportion of PC gamers picture their world as an isolated island in the middle of a console ocean of dross, developers – intellectual magpies and miscegenators by nature and necessity – have constantly filched from their peers across the formats. Mostly. *Medieval Total War* has no truck with such attitudes. This is as PC a game as it's possible to conceive of, but pure-bred elite rather than a degraded inbred.

Like *Shogun*, the first *Total War* game, *Medieval* takes the two unassailable, polar bastions of the PC format – realtime and turn-based strategy – and combines them into an elegant chimera.

The turn-based section of the game describes all action on the strategic scale, positioning you as King, moving armies across Europe, securing the future of your nation and performing the diverse matters of governing. When the forces clash – an invasion, a siege, any border fracas – we enter the realtime element, where troops are deployed and manoeuvred to the best tactical advantage and victory, heroic or knave-like depending on your temperament.



The initial momentum of a powerful charge leads to the most devastating impact for cavalry units. After that, rather than staying in an protracted encounter, it's often wise to disengage, reposition and repeat.

Towers rain arrows, walls collapse onto bewildered defenders and mighty siege engines send projectiles at the crumbling, yet defiant edifice

And it's temperament that *Medieval* best manages to convey – taking the atmosphere and tone of its chosen period and letting it permeate each design choice.

On the strategic, turn-based scale, for example, it gives proper weight to the importance of family lineage and the personal charisma of leaders. Kings must think of the marriage bonds of their daughters carefully, either to secure an alliance with a foreign power or to buy the loyalty of a possibly rebellious Lord. The individual generals gain vices and virtues as they progress through the game, according to their actions. Run away, and gain a reputation as a coward. A look at one of your leaders' traits often reveals an array of personality disorders as bizarre as anything in real medieval history.

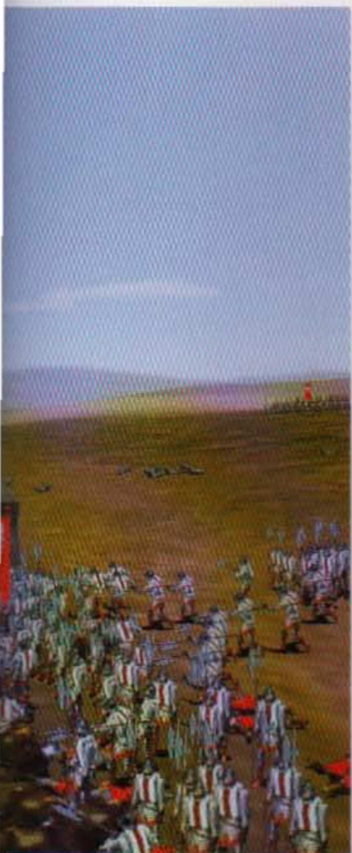
On the realtime mode, the *Total War* games are the only ones which make an attempt at representing an actual conflict. Morale and positioning is what victory rests upon – not a tank rush. Real tactics and real strategy.

It's arguable that some gamers will find either the turn-based or realtime elements eventually tiresome, however it's hard to begrudge a game that allows you to fine-tune the exact form of your experience. If a player wishes to concentrate more upon the high-level ruling, any or all battles may be auto-resolved. If it's only the blooded sword of generalship that appeals, the computer can be set to govern any of your provinces, removing possibly tedious micro-management. Alternatively, they could turn to the skirmish battles or historical campaigns, tracing the path and laying the blows of a famous figure. Perhaps it's something of a shame no reduced scale turn-based Campaign map was included, for those who feel intimidated by immediately jumping into a game that spans Europe, but it's a minor omission.

This is, more so than any game this year, a reminder why it's foolish to overlook the PC format or wish ill of it. While it's conceivable that delights like *Neverwinter Nights* or *Warcraft III* could exist happily on a console in hobbled form, a version of *Medieval* pushed into a form other than PC wouldn't be *Medieval* at all. It's a game that respects history, and in doing so, makes its own.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**

Previously in E109

















The wooden palisades prove ineffective in stopping a determined foe (above left). The desert terrain leads to new tactical challenges, with some unit types proving inefficient in these baking climes (above right)



While walls mostly offer protection to troops, a carefully aimed Mangonel-shot boulder can send a segment of masonry collapsing on the lines of soldier with all the expected resultant havoc

Siege the day

While the unit tech-tree has been expanded ten-fold between *Shogun* and *Medieval*, it's the integration of true sieges into the realtime section that provides the most visible change. All manner of fortifications, from a simple wooden fort to a true citadel, can be constructed in the turn-based mode and then assaulted in the realtime section, leading to some of the more memorable conflicts in the game. Towers rain arrows on rank upon rank of troops, walls collapse onto bewildered defenders and mighty siege engines' long limbs spasm to send projectile after projectile at the crumbling, yet defiant edifice: it's nothing if not dramatic.



Stuntman

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Infogrammes** Developer: **Reflections** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





Just the good ol' boys, never meanin' no harm. The second film, based on TV favourite 'The Dukes of Hazzard', offers much scope for frivolous ramp abuse

A curious game. Curious and annoying and compelling all at the same time. **Edge** still believes that *Stuntman* is a great idea, but something's clearly gone wrong between the drawing board and final submission phases. Games that demand repetition (and *Stuntman* is about as repetitive as games get) need to have quality gameplay underpinning the structure. But *Stuntman* is too rigid, it requires almost pixel-perfect driving and gives the player little creative freedom to showboat.

Early previews hinted that each stunt would allow the player to take risks and be rewarded for clever and flamboyant driving. And while it's true that deviation from the prescribed path is possible, it's a much more binary experience than anticipated. "Into the trashcans," barks the stunt director. "Swerve though the traffic. Make the jump!" And so on. And though you get a higher completion percentage for performing more individual stunts, crucially, you don't get anything extra for how well you perform them. Although there are moments of exhilaration, especially when a stunt sequence has finally been completed, judged on the driving experience alone *Stuntman* is little better than average.

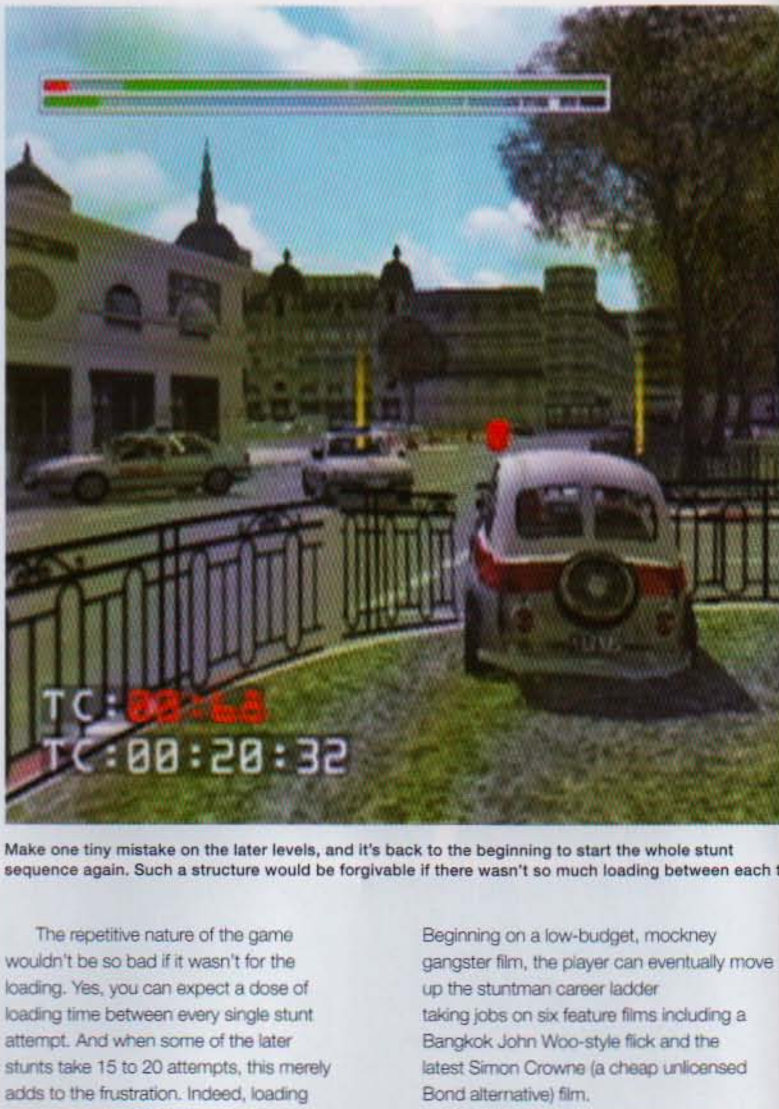
Although there are moments of exhilaration, judged on the driving experience alone Stuntman is little better than average

There's little flow to the game either. Structurally, it might have been better to show the player a fly-over of the whole stunt challenge, pointing out the tasks that needed to be performed, and then let the player explore that arena. Instead, it's a stop/start experience – as soon as one task is fouled up or a checkpoint is missed, it's straight back to the beginning to start again.





Large yellow icons indicate the type of stunt that needs to be performed and where. Unfortunately, this rather undermines the sense of authenticity established in the cut-scenes



Make one tiny mistake on the later levels, and it's back to the beginning to start the whole stunt sequence again. Such a structure would be forgivable if there wasn't so much loading between each t

The repetitive nature of the game wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for the loading. Yes, you can expect a dose of loading time between every single stunt attempt. And when some of the later stunts take 15 to 20 attempts, this merely adds to the frustration. Indeed, loading times are so long in between the main menu and finally reaching the game, after a short cut-scene, that a vegetative state could well be achieved.

But more surprising, and disappointing, is the twitchy handling of the cars. When many of the stunts require painfully accurate positioning, such a basic handling model does little to make jumps or powerslides feel satisfying. This becomes most evident on the snow and sand levels (Switzerland and Egypt respectively) because the flat landscape textures give few clues to the nuances of ridges and dips.

Regardless of these flaws the game can be fun for those who stay the course. Beginning on a low-budget, mockney gangster film, the player can eventually move up the stuntman career ladder taking jobs on six feature films including a Bangkok John Woo-style flick and the latest Simon Crowne (a cheap unlicensed Bond alternative) film.

Cleverly, once you achieve a level of competence on each stunt the footage is spliced into each film's trailer to be viewed. And, although the replays are hardly state of the art, it is rewarding to see your work make it to the big screen and gives the player some incentive to progress.

Stuntman is sure to divide people into two distinct camps. For those with a calm demeanour and oodles of patience the game can be strangely compelling and worthwhile. Others, however, may just want to break something in despair and utter frustration.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Previously in E99, E102, E112













The damage modelling in *Stuntman* is impressive, though should your vehicle sustain too many knocks you'll get a ticking off from the director. And it's back to the start







Unsurprisingly, the snow mobile is the most difficult vehicle to control in the game – especially when you have to navigate around a ski lodge. Trying to land squarely after a jump is particularly frustrating



Fall guy

A more interesting add on to the game is the Stunt Constructor arena. Ramps, 'smashables' and special stunt devices, such as rings of fire, can be arranged to one's own specifications. Although this adds some variety to the main game, your grand plans for constructing the kind of death-defying stunts Colt Seavers only dreams of are thwarted by the memory restrictions of the host hardware.

Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Blizzard** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E96**, **E106**

Westwood, the creator of the *C&C* series, may have taken its eye off the realtime strategy ball recently, but there's clearly no danger of Blizzard following suit. While its rival countrymen seem happy to experiment in the alien ways of the firstperson shooter, Blizzard has shunned change – *Warcraft III* revealing a team determined to remain faithful to the form that found it fame: traditional realtime strategy.

The flimsy orcs-versus-human premise of *Warcraft II* proved just enough to carry that game six years ago, but the proliferation of titles inspired by it have forced Blizzard to evolve its universe. Hence in *Reign of Chaos*, the two races become four: Night Elves and Undead doubling the player-controlled tribes, and ensuring essential variation throughout the singleplayer campaign. And it's the solo game's elegantly scripted narrative that comes as the biggest surprise. Although a typically twee tale, the fantasy formula is punctuated at key moments by tortuous twists and turns, while the narrative unravels at the perfect pace, revealing its secrets through timely and well-scripted in-game engine cinematics.

Pleasingly, Blizzard appears to have exercised great self-discipline in avoiding the temptation to overdo its sumptuous trademark FMV sequences, and limiting them to bookend the linear campaigns. It's the kind of restraint that pervades the game completely – and almost always for the better. Resource management is simplified to mining gold and collecting lumber (the oil of *Warcraft II* being jettisoned in favour of a slicker, more streamlined approach to base building). And while each race's common goal is always to collect resources and build a significant army pre-war, this simplicity disguises an extra layer of complexity thanks to the inclusion of Heroes, hugely strong units boasting an inventory able to hold up to six magical items.

Warcraft III has little to do with innovation and everything to do with polish, the result being a level of graphical style and bug-free tech-tree perfection that eclipses all the efforts of its fantasy RTS rivals. The result may not be the revolution in realtime strategy that many had hoped for, but is indisputably a significant evolution; and one which elevates the genre to previously unattained levels of sophistication.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**











The four playable races are unique in look as well as in their strengths and weaknesses. Some buildings, such as the Night Elves' Tree of Life, can even uproot from their original position and walk slowly away from danger



As Hero units gain experience, they unlock access to unique new abilities. With a unit cap of only 90 enforced in both singleplayer and multiplayer games, their survival is therefore of the utmost importance



We can be heroes

Each of the four races boasts three Heroes apiece. As well as improving in strength, agility and intelligence with experience, they also boast their own special abilities. These unique skills range from healing powers and armour-inducing spells, to raising the dead and summoning Blizzards – a popular offensive spell that returns from *Warcraft II*. Even when Heroes die, it's not necessarily game over; if an altar has been built, resurrection is possible in return for a large gold investment. This, and the fact that even the lowliest units can be transformed into militia via the new 'call to arms' option, means that quick one-sided victories are made much more difficult.

ZooCube

Format: **GameCube (reviewed), GBA** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **PuzzleKings/Coyote** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in E112











When stacks get to three or more, the logistics of manipulating the cube become incredibly fraught – especially on higher levels, of course



Multiplayer matching

Together with the main 'classic' mode, *ZooCube* features competitive and collaborative options with up to four players. In the former, you are able to send troublesome items across to other players. In the latter, players must swap coloured items to keep their stacks in order. These are mildly diverting, but don't provide half the sense of intense interaction as the simple Game Boy *Tetris* link-up of olde. There are also a couple of singleplayer alternative modes, but these seem to have been added merely to provide more options rather than true gameplay diversity.



As eyecandy, Edge wonders whether the abstract nature of the backgrounds in Nalin Sharma's original concept, *Cubic Juggler* (see Audience with, p74) would perhaps have suited *ZooCube* significantly better

Like most publishers these days, Acclaim is best known for taking licences and flogging them to within a millimetre of their lives. So it's refreshing to see that the company is prepared to take a risk on something new. There's no 'ZooCube' film, TV series or absurd theatrical sport. It began as a competition entry in this very magazine, not on the screens of a million multiplexes.

Yet amidst all the talk of innovation there is one simple fact: like *Tetris*, this is a game about tidying up. You control a cube in the centre of the screen, which you can turn on three axes. Coming in toward the cube, from three directions, are various animal shapes. If you match two shapes, they disappear, if two shapes land on the same face of the cube they begin a stack. Stack too many and it's game over. So, on a basic level, this is *Tetris* territory – it's about identifying an incoming object and finding the best place for it.

But *ZooCube* has a few gameplay twists. Stacks can be juggled using the shoulder buttons, so that you can match a shape at the bottom with an incoming animal part. You can also 'lock-on' incoming shapes to a particular stack, allowing you to move the cube and think about the next problem. The combination of these two factors introduces a vital multi-tasking element, and on later levels when animal bits are flying in at ridiculous speeds, the pressure to think on several different levels, and in three dimensions, is intense. Add to this, the fact that power-ups are released when you lock-on an item, giving you access to various bombs and mutators, and all those panic attacks you suffered playing *Chu Chu Rockets* will seem like the fluffy, momentary angst of small children.

ZooCube is very addictive. As with all the best puzzle games, a quick 'go' turns into two hours, the shapes, the noises the music lulling you into a kind of manic vegetative state – body slumped and lifeless, mind like a chess master on crystal meth.

We could have done without the really cheesy background story and the simple landscapes sitting pointlessly behind the action, which make the game look cheap and tawdry. Which it isn't. What it is, is an old-fashioned frantic high concept videogame that, like *Wetrix*, takes the baton offered by *Tetris* and runs with it in a weird new direction. Connoisseurs of the puzzle game are encouraged to follow it.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Dino Stalker

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**105

After a couple of false starts, Capcom finally appears to have produced a decent Gun Survivor game in the shape of *Dino Stalker*, which foregoes the zombie-filled *Resident Evil* franchise but maintains the free movement that characterised its predecessors. Apart from the novelty value of freedom to manoeuvre though (which, in any case, gets wrist-achingly annoying pretty quickly thanks to the awkwardly-placed G-con 2 d-pad), it's actually the well-balanced level design that stands out. Indeed, on the whole, those levels that are on rails turn out to be the most satisfying.

The game also features a delicately balanced system of weapon power-ups, with the advantages of using a sniper rifle offset by the time it takes to use it, and additional weapons scattered around the landscape balanced by the fact that only one can be equipped at any time. Thanks to a rift in the space-time continuum, the game's dinosaur opponents are also well-considered, with a range of abilities and attacks injecting welcome variety. Like any other lightgun game, it's shortlived, but Capcom has also clearly put substantial effort into replayability. And while it lasts it's very entertaining.

Edge rating: Six out of ten






It's not the freedom of movement that stands out about *Dino Stalker*, but rather the well-conceived system of weapon upgrades and urgent tempo. This ensures choices such as when to use the in-built sniper rifle, for example, are a fraught rather than an unthinking decision, and therefore making the completion of successive levels increasingly satisfying

Breath of Fire II

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Ubi Soft** Developer: **Capcom** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**







It's not without fault, but *Breath of Fire II* is beautifully paced, full of charming characterisation, and boasts such delicately balanced complimentary combat systems, it belies any criticism of the GBA's SNES ports. Significantly, it's also been optimised for frequent bursts of short play, making it an ideal fit for its portable new platform

Critics of the GBA will no doubt point to *Breath of Fire II* as further evidence of the platform's uninspired release schedule. It is, after all, just another SNES port, and on top of that it's barely differentiated from its immediate predecessor. Once again, players take control of a dragon-transforming hero called Ryu; explore villages, dungeons and the surrounding wilderness; pick up new party members; overcome encounters and boss battles using special abilities and magic spells, and save the world from certain doom.

But if there's a game that proves the lie to the assertion that SNES ports somehow undermine the GBA, this is surely it. It distinguishes itself from the original *Breath of Fire* by introducing an evolving township that players control, and a combinatorial power-up 'fusion' system. And in terms of pacing, structure, ease of interface and sheer entertainment, it's a masterclass. It's not without fault, and at times it's difficult to pick up after a long period of abstinence, but it's absolutely at home on Nintendo's portable platform, and features so much charm and so many deft touches that it absolutely deserves to be re-released – and savoured by audiences both old and new.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Enclave

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Swing!** Developer: **Starbreeze Studios** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**98, **E**109









The centrepiece of the featureset of *Enclave* is the option to be the bad guys, and replay the missions from the perspective of evil. Whereas once you'd have to defend a trader, you now have to assassinate him

There's no doubt that *Enclave* is one of the most astounding looking titles on Xbox. Intricate textures, encrusted with fine detail and some outstanding environments make for an impressive stage to play out the arcane drama of light versus dark. Look past these cosmetics, however, and you'll discover a brain-dead videogame, utterly dependent on a powerful graphics engine for life support.

Enclave joins *Wreckless* in the leagues of vacuous, design-free bubbleheads. There's a threadbare framework of a game here, but it's lost in the awful, comedic mess of a Morris dance that is close-quarter combat, and the trivial death penalty levied at the player when attempting to take on more than one assailant at once. It takes just one tough, sudden offence from the enemy forces to put an end to the player's quest, and reset them at the beginning of the stage.

There's no difficulty curve, just a mess of spurious battle encounters that sap an increasing number of hit points as the game progresses. There's no guidance or warning of impending attack, just illegible braille giving the player no chance to employ any skill or enjoy themselves. The next *Halo*? Don't believe the hype.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Capcom vs SNK 2 EO

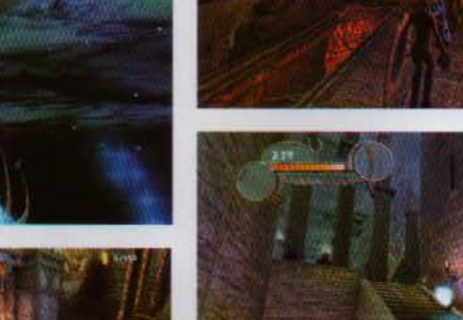
Format: **GC** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

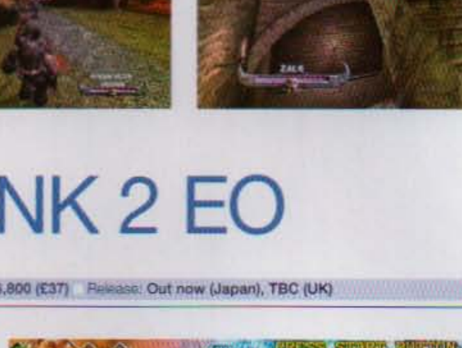
Games are fragile, built from tiny cogs. You change even one part – something small, something theoretically superficial – and you run the risk of everything collapsing. Capcom's policy of porting its two-dimension fighting series to every possible format was always going to meet with problems on GameCube. The pad doesn't fit the six-button styling of the mechanic; hence the 'EO' – Easy Operation.

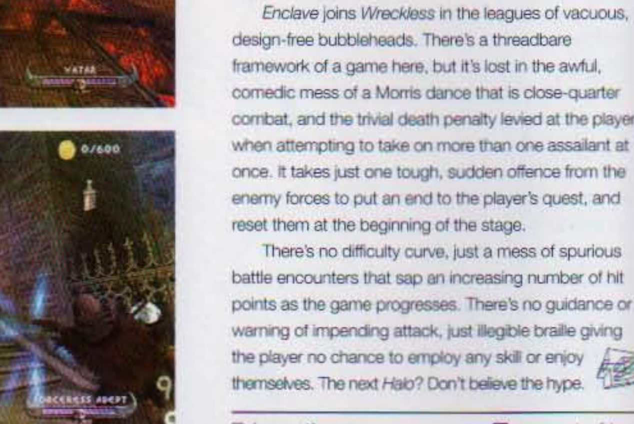
But this isn't a superficial change: all the special moves are given *Smash Brothers*-style shortcuts on the C-stick – left does a fireball, down does a hurricane kick, and so on – and the kicks and punches lose much of their impact and import. The balance disintegrates. There is no skill or thrill in dragon punching your way out of a corner, no subtlety, nothing to learn, and no reward. There is no *difficulty*. In twoplayer it becomes farcical: how can you celebrate some glorious special move victory when all it took was a single movement?

Point: that Capcom's fighting games can be intricate and beautiful, but they're delicate. The tiniest changes might destroy. You rip out a cog as big as this, and everything's bound to fall apart.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

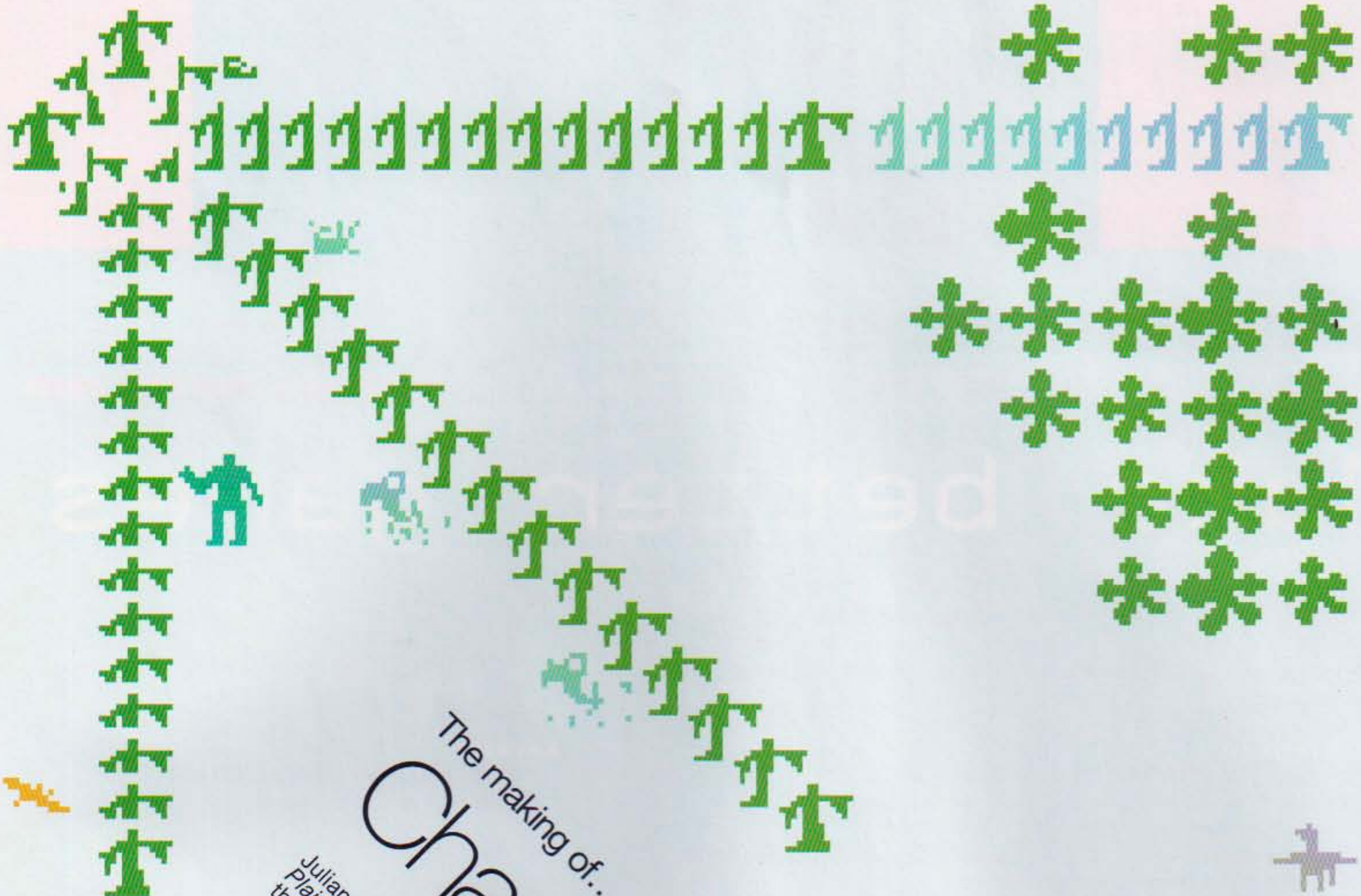








No matter where you place the punches or kicks, you still end up with one big green button, one small red button, and no tactile balance. Which is a real shame



The making of...

Chaos

Julian Gollop's imaginative strategy title (subtitled *Magic & Death on the Plain of Limbo*) brought board games into the 20th century, and took the first step down an alternative path for mainstream videogames

Original format: **Spectrum**
Publisher: **Games Workshop**
Developer: **Julian Gollop**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1984**



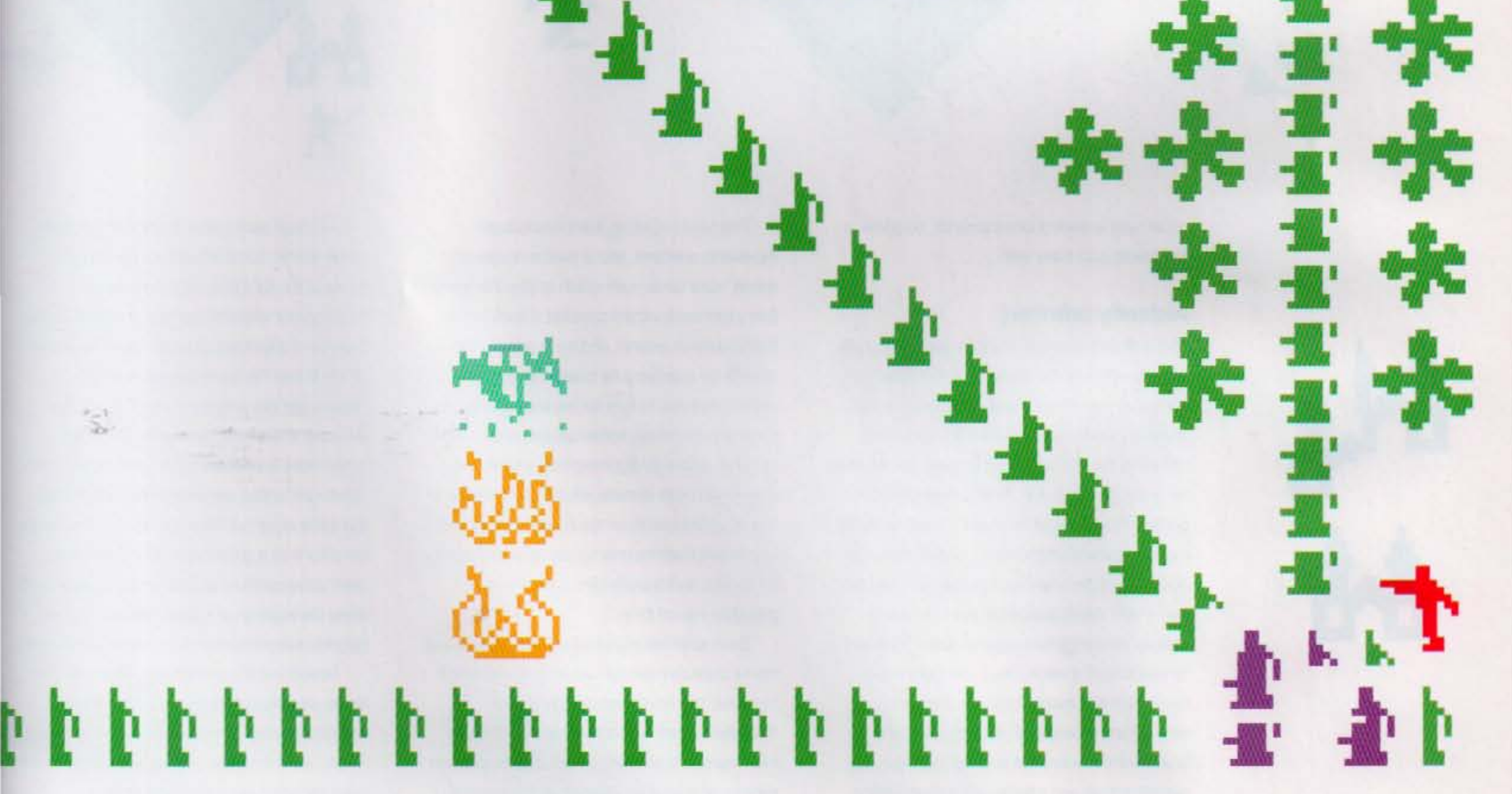


Julian Gollop was always a board game fanatic ("Ever since I was 14 or so.") and *Chaos*, like his other earlier titles, was based upon his own design for a more traditional card game. He used to design them obsessively and saw computers as a way of hiding more rules in the game: rules that would 'feel right' but be too complicated to be worked through in a pen-and-paper scenario, and so would allow for a richer playing experience.

For someone who's been designing and tweaking these video/board games for over 20 years, the man largely responsible for the successful *X-Com* series of games, Gollop doesn't see the point in playing the same rules for too long, and refuses to rest on his laurels: no











Those experiencing the delights of *Lost Kingdoms* on GameCube can thank Julian Gollop for kick-starting this strange sub-genre

set of rules is perfect or sacrosanct, no game is too precious to tinker with.

Ardently admired

"According to some of my colleagues, and many other people who have played it, this is the best game I've ever done," he seems to sigh on his company Codo Games' Website, recounting *Chaos* as the fifth in a line of strategy games that he wrote. It's not a sigh. In fact, when asked in person, he's proud of the game. "It was definitely the most ardently admired out of everything I've done." But *Chaos* was actually based on a card game he'd cobbled together out of an early Games Workshop board game called 'Warlock'. "It was kind of a wacky title… we used to play my version of it every Christmas until, well, actually only a couple of years ago. It had a board but the board just seemed pointless… I wanted a map and a sense of location. *Chaos* emerged out of that card game."

The rules of *Chaos*, then: each player represents a wizard, and is dealt a number of secret 'spell cards' with which to play the game. Every turn each wizard can cast a spell, move their creatures around, and try to attack other wizards on a rectangular board. Spells can create creatures to fight for the wizard (dragons, giant rats, zombies), some can be used to strike opponents directly (lightning bolt, fireball) and others had more esoteric effects, for instance, to mix up all the pieces on the board. ("There was a bug where that one only turned up once in every 64 games, so it's pretty rare… but that's probably a good thing.")

Each spell has a chance of failing. Spells that create creatures can be cast as illusions, which never fail, but other wizards may cast a 'Disbelieve' spell on illusory creatures to make them vanish. The wizards take turns to summon minions and set them against each other until only one is left standing.

Although each player starts with 13 spells, some will fail, some will just not be the right spells at the right time and some will only prolong your wizard's chances of survival rather than be of any direct offensive use. The upshot of this is that the game can never quite degenerate into a fireball-hurling competition because when it can be over in 15–20 turns, every move is significant and must be turned to maximum tactical advantage. But importantly the game does not force this on you. The player can play it as a quick blast, hurling the most destructive spells as quickly as possible, and still enjoy the experience against similarly-minded players or lower-powered computer opponents.

Speed was the game's lure, and soon you found you were plotting your moves more carefully, putting on an illusory air of nonchalance as you wondered that maybe, just maybe if your giant bat could last a turn against your opponent's green dragon, your wizard stood a





The graphics and animation were predictably weedy, but the deep strategical play allowed players to fill in the rest with their imaginations







chance of acquiring a fireball spell from the nearby Magic Wood and be able to finish the beast off. These thoughts must have been the tip of the iceberg for an average Gollop family Christmas.

After doing most of the design for his card game, Gollop confesses that a lot of the design decisions for the computer were down to what would fit on the screen: 13 spells, an 11 by 7 playing area. "Although converting any board game's rules precisely to a computer screen is kind of a pointless activity... some people might enjoy it but it's not something I go for."

Dubious honour

Chaos was released originally in 1984, after only a month's programming (although not bad considering this was Julian's first experience of programming for the Spectrum) and had the dubious honour of being one of the only videogames marketed by Games Workshop, the fledgling board game manufacturer. It was the only title it released which wasn't a conversion of one of its board games. Gollop's (then) group of programming allies, Redshift Software, had a fairly close relationship with them, including some mixed conversions of other favourites such as 'Talisman' and 'Battle Cars'. In fact, Gollop turned down an offer to convert a presumably lucrative Judge Dredd licence because "they just wanted some mindless sideways scrolling shooter... not very interesting." However Games Workshop's efforts to push videogames exclusively in its own stores was probably doomed by the relatively small size of the videogames market in the UK, which needed every possible retail opportunity, and it abandoned games publishing after relatively few titles (as Gollop says, "They only had about eight stores back then, how did they expect to sell computer games?"). A budget re-release in 1987 by the Firebird Silver range attracted far more attention, and 'Your Sinclair' gave the game away on its cover tape twice in 1989.



Chaos fans over the years have made a Java version, a 3D Windows version and even a very decent Game Boy Advance version, testament to the game's continuing popularity and the affection in which it is held.

For all the frills *Chaos* is still a board game, however Gollop hit upon what it was that stopped people playing such games: "Most games were; well, still are, clones of *Space Invaders*," where any innovation in technology was as impressive and exciting as a pedestrian-looking, but playable game. To see the innovation in *Chaos* is to see the fusion of two different types of play: one was the strategic thinking and slower pace of board games such as 'Risk', 'Diplomacy' or even 'Go', a mode of play which was picking up cult popularity thanks to young companies such as Games Workshop and Steve Jackson Games. The other sort was the unique fast-paced world of play that a computer could provide: where the same precise and fair calculations of routine wins and losses could be worked out instantly to provide a richer sense of immersion to the player.

Dim memories

When the need for swift reflexes is taken out of the traditional arcade game, much more depth can be extracted from it without removing the excitement of the player being able to shape their own drama. Gollop's latest incarnation of the *Chaos* formula is a game which can be played by email over days, and players can plot their moves with immense precision for hours, simulating the arcade action in little chunks; each turn lasts only ten seconds of 'realtime', and an immensely satisfying game can be played back with the video-style 'replay' controls over several minutes, every twist and turn in the action packed with players' strategic thinking rather than dim memories of button-bashing.

Although *Chaos* did not have such a replay feature, the game still showcased the idea that a board game need not be a turgid series of moves represented "like a spreadsheet", as Gollop describes one of his earlier games. In *Chaos*, the pieces onscreen moved while you stared at them, planning your next turn. Arrows and fireballs zipped across the screen as the game progressed, and wizards met their end in a shower of of chunky Spectrum colours. *Chaos* had the intricacies of a board game combined with the speed and flair of a contemporary arcade game. Requests for an official update to *Chaos* still trickle into Gollop's mailbox, but why tempt him to tinker with a good game?





RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 50, October 1997

Fifty issues in, and **Edge** was looking to the future. "A Mario Killer in the Making?" asked the lead news story. But the piece wasn't anything to do with Ken Kutaragi's cryptic references to PS2 later in the issue. This was "technology thought to be firmly at the apex of realtime visualisation"– VM Labs Nuon. "The possibilities just stagger me," said **Jeff Minter**, dooming the chip to obscurity. Out There, meanwhile, considered cartridge prostitution. "Nintendo bans the rent boys" screamed tabloid **Edge**, detailing Nintendo's prudish dictat on the seedy business of renting N64 games.

A 12-page feature on the last 50 issues provided retrospective heaven for fans of the "well, with hindsight..."-style stupidity that Reset offers monthly, although the real highlights were the reminiscences and predictions offered by the industry pundits. **Testuya Mizuguchi**'s best experience in the industry over the last four years? "Floating capsules, or isolation tanks. No lights, no sound. Just your brain – which feels like it's existing in nothing. It helps me to decide what to do with my life." Played *Rez*? The Reset Campaign for More Industry Flotation Tanks starts here.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"Pentium 1000 is announced, EA purchases Microsoft, Lionhead finishes its first game (joke!)."
Molyneux offers his predictions for **E**100. Well, *Black & White* arrived in **E**96, so **Edge** supposes that's *technically* early. Joke!

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"Another bitter PlayStation owner."
Edge's title for a letter from a reader accusing **Edge** of (yawn) bias towards the N64.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

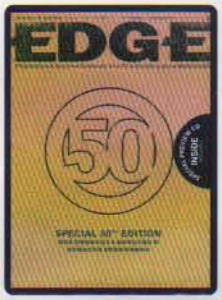
Ganbare Goemon (N64, 8/10); *Broken Sword 2* (PC, 9/10); *F1 '97* (PS, 8/10); *Croc* (PS, 6/10); *GunBullet* (PS, 7/10); *Ghost in the Shell* (PS, 7/10); *Tetrisphere* (N64, 6/10); *Marvel Super Heroes* (Saturn, 8/10)



1



2



3



4



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6

1. Well, it makes a change from falling off a ledge, **Edge** supposes 2. *Sentinel Returns*, with music by John Carpenter 3. The issue's gold box; a decision to use real gold was vetoed by **Edge**'s miserly publisher 4. Kutaragi and friend, on holiday in Hawaii 5. Bungie's pre-*Halo* work: hit or *Myth*? 6. *Tetrisphere* was able "to draw players away from boiling milk pans" allegedly

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Glen O'Connell, communications director at Rage, remembers getting punch drunk





Glen O'Connell's mother (not pictured) used to wait patiently while her son played *Punch-Out!!*

"Ladies and gentleman – Bald Bull. Break, body blow, body blow – knock him out. Right hook – he's down for the count. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 – knock out. Great fighting, you're an up and coming boxer." For anyone who, like me, stuffed obscene numbers of 10ps into Nintendo's classic *Punch-Out!!* coin-op during the mid- to late-'80s, these words may be etched into your brain forever.

Quite simply, *Punch-Out!!* was an awesome game. The graphics were cool looking and the characters had real menace, especially Bald Bull and Mr Sandman. The cabinet also commanded respect due to its awesome size and the jumbo, oversize knockout button was a joy to bash with the palm of your hand.

Each and every Saturday I used to visit the local town centre in Liverpool with my mum and wish away the bus journey in order to get to an arcade called Las Vegas. Now, as you had to be either over 16 or accompanied by an adult to enter the arcade, my mum would kindly help me get in and then stand around trying not too look too bored for anything up to two hours at a time while I played *Punch-Out!!*.

That's the true value of parenthood, and maybe what made me realise all those years ago why videogames are truly the kiddy cocaine.

FAQ

Henry Jenkins

professor of literature and comparative media studies, MIT



Author of 'From Barbie to Mortal Kombat', Henry Jenkins was called to testify before the US Senate on games and violence. He also designs games through the 'Games to Teach' project, and was consulted during the development of the recent 'Game On' exhibition at the Barbican in London.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
I've been writing about computer and videogames for more than a decade now. I am just now turning my attention to creating games through the MIT-Microsoft 'Games to Teach' initiative. We are in the early stages of developing games which will allow high school students to engage with core concepts in science, maths, engineering and the humanities.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
An obscure early Nintendo title called *A Boy and His Blob*. The Blob could turn into dozens of different tools depending on what jelly beans you fed it and this allowed you to carve your own path through the space. It was the first videogame I played which didn't have rails, which seemed to allow players much more flexibility in deciding which direction they wanted to travel and how they wanted to get there. It was a breathtaking moment when I discovered you could travel right to left in this game, after being frustrated with always having to go left to right. Pity it never found its market.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
Super Collapse on my PC. I have found this game – and a succession of games from *Tetris* to *Snood* – profoundly addictive. There's something very compelling about pattern recognition games which keeps me playing and playing.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
During the summer, I'm probably logging 5–7 hours per week. During the academic year, it goes down dramatically. I have less and less time to play games the more I am asked to write and speak about them.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
I've never been much of an arcade player – I mostly like to watch. Right now, the most spectacular performances at the arcades can be found around *Dance Dance Revolution*. I was walking in Melbourne last summer and saw two middle eastern girls dancing barefoot in the window of an arcade and they were the best *Dance Dance Revolution* performers I've ever seen anywhere. It was a spectacular show.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
Joystick 101 (http://www.joystick101.org/).

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Morrowind.

What stage is your current project at?
Early prototyping. The 'Games to Teach' project was designed to flesh out how games might contribute to advanced placement high school and early college level education.

What aspect of it do you think is most impressive?
Edutainment has been a largely dead category because people have trouble thinking about how to make the educational content organic to the gameplay. I think we've come up with a range of compelling approaches to this challenge which we hope to get into production in the next few years. Most edutainment products have all of the educational value of a bad game and the entertainment value of a bad lecture. We're trying to bring together MIT-quality content and state of the industry gameplay. We are getting advice from MIT's top scientists and from some of the best game designers in the business.

"What we need is someone who consumers trust to tell them where the most interesting work is being done and why it matters"

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
The further diversification of games in terms of content, audience and workforce. The thriving of an independent gaming movement which becomes a site of innovation and experimentation and pushes the mainstream industry to take more risks.

What disappoints you about the videogame industry?
When innovative games, which really represent fresh new directions for the medium as a whole, go unrecognised by fans and consumers. Despite many recent breakthroughs, the gaming world remains fundamentally conservative in its conception of the medium. When in doubt, blow something up.

Whose work do you most admire?
Shigeru Miyamoto, Warren Spector, Will Wright, Brenda Laurel, Eric Zimmerman.

What current gaming platform are you most satisfied with?
You won't find me taking sides on that question. Our offices got robbed twice last month – first, they took the PlayStation2, then they came back for the Xbox. Not sure if that makes any kind of statement about the desirability of the different platforms or not.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? (Discuss)
It's a false distinction. Games are a lively art. They are an art because they engage our senses, stimulate our imagination, encourage a playful and creative response, provoke powerful emotions, give expressive shape to our lives and turn the computer into a toy. In other words, they are an art because they are entertainment.

What pleases/disappoints you about the way videogames are discussed in both the specialist and mainstream press?
We are 30-plus years into the history of the media and for the most part, all the mainstream media wants to write about games has to do with issues of media violence. It's an important issue, but it's missing the bigger story about how this media is transforming the entertainment world. As for the specialist press, I think it's often too narrow in its focus and often doesn't provide the degree of support necessary to alert consumers to really innovative and interesting products. What we need is someone who consumers trust to tell them where the most interesting work is being done and why it matters.

inbox

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Furoshiki's comments about cheating in *Phantasy Star Online* (**E**112) raise a number of interesting points about online gaming and those who choose to cheat, but they only scratch the surface of what is a complex issue that could significantly affect the future of the industry.

No one who has played *PSO* during its Dreamcast incarnation can have remained untouched by the destructive influence of cheating. Furthermore, the abuse of the game through the use of cheat codes has reached the point where cheating itself is no longer the primary issue. There is a significant minority of players who have gone beyond twisting the game mechanics to their own advantage, and instead appear hell-bent on trying to ruin the experience for everyone else as well.

Terms such as 'FSOD', 'CK' and 'NOL' may be unfamiliar to those who haven't ventured into the *PSO* universe (for the benefit of the uninitiated they all refer to methods of deliberately crashing another player's console, or worse still corrupting his/her player file) but they are common parlance on Pioneer 2. In fact few people talk about anything else these days. Sega's masterpiece has descended into a chaotic, fragmented world where Yuji Naka's dream of "cooperative play" has been abandoned in preference to adopting a suspicious attitude towards anyone who even tries to make conversation with you.

I was one of the very few British players who managed to get onto the Japanese trial for *PSO Episode I & II* for GameCube. It was like a breath of fresh air. For once I and many other *PSO* fanatics got to experience the genius of Naka-san without the ever present fear of being the next victim of an anonymous electronic mugger. And boy, was it worth it.

As more and more online games are requiring pay-to-play fees, I have an absolute right as a consumer to get what I'm paying for. In my opinion, that is to be able to play the game as it was intended, without other people spoiling it for me. If I went to see a film and someone deliberately tried to block my view or drown out the soundtrack by shouting in my face, I'd want my money back because it's not what I shelled out my hard-earned cash for. In fact they'd most likely be ejected by the cinema staff. Yet people are allowed to disrupt my entertainment on *PSO* and despite Sonic Team's efforts (by patching the server) the problem has largely remained and the trouble-makers are still around.

Game developers need to concentrate their efforts not just on creating quality titles, but also on making sure that this effort isn't wasted by a lack of security measures to stop the curse of the disruptive cheats. As the release of *PSO* for GC draws ever closer, the debate on the Web forums has turned to questions of "How long will it be before the game is destroyed by idiots with their codes?" Many have even stated that should cheating become widespread as happened with the DC, they won't buy the title at all – a worrying sign, and one that publishers should take note of.

Furoshiki is right, the cultural differences of east and west is one cause of friction in a game, and my comments only highlight another of the many problems which are combining to spoil what should be a pleasurable experience for everyone.
Richard Hopkins

After having read about further military involvement in the games industry, one must ask the question: does this mean that the actions taken by gamers while playing games can be translated (indefinitely) to the real-world and have real-world consequences?

After the numerous American school massacres I was led to believe by some of the defence lawyers, that playing games can in no way improve a person's ability to 'kill'. One person was even heard to have said something along the lines of "The guys just pointed their guns and shot," something anyone can do.

Indeed I am not blind to the strategic implications of videogames to the army, but nor am I blind to the negative impact such a relationship would have on our already infamous reputation. Gaming would become the brewer of death itself whereby countries like America and the UK will develop games to 'train' soldiers, while Iraq and Afghanistan will be developing their own – wholly defying the purpose of 'games'.

The following is an extract from a daily American newspaper: "The military has supplied advice to videogame makers for other titles over the years, but *America's Army: the Official US Army Game* is the military division's first foray into creating games itself."

Battlezone on the Atari immediately springs to mind where the 'military advice' comes in to play, but to have the army make its own games is an unknown. Is this a wise path to take especially in an age where computers/consoles are far more powerful than in Ed Rotberg's day?
Toops

The military and videogaming's close relationship is certainly getting rather intimate. Turn to p62, the start of this month's Wargames feature.

As an undergraduate student reading history, but also a devoted gamer, it has been brought to my attention on more than one occasion that my spare time is not spent at the same intellectual level as that of many of my co-students. While my university flatmates indulge in the pleasures of Orwell or Tolkien, I am trying to locate dog-tags around a rainy tanker or fine tune the balance of an NSX. Although games generally offer a reasonable level of mental stimulation, it is rare that I find myself genuinely challenged, at least in intellectual terms. Some games provoke a great deal of thought, but this rarely progresses beyond working out where the next key may be located or how much wing angle to carry. One of the few genuine mental challenges I have encountered is *Riven* (PC), one of the most satisfying games I have played due to the extensive mind-boggling puzzles.

I think it is about time developers realised the diverse nature of their audience; many would welcome a game that cannot be fully appreciated

"Players have gone beyond twisting the game mechanics to their own advantage, and instead appear hell-bent on trying to ruin the experience for everyone else as well"



Richard Hopkins worries that those responsible for ruining the *PSO* experience on DC are likely to be making appearances in future online experiences

without a little outside knowledge. Furthermore a game with genuinely open puzzles that may require a little prolonged thought away from the screen would be welcome in my collection.
Paul Ibbotson

Having played *Halo*, the one thing that stuck out was the terrible plot. In this day and age surely Bungie can conjure up something more convincing than, "You have to save the world... you are the last man alive." What happened to evolution? *Beneath A Steel Sky* to *Max Payne*, *Broken Sword* to... hell, even *Quake* has a better story than that. Stop degrading console players with shit storylines and get a decent writer in.
Dave Johnston

Generally speaking, plot remains one of the gaming elements that has undergone the least amount of evolution. But perhaps you'll find *Halo 2*'s narrative more accomplished – not long to wait now.

With regard to Piracy in the Playground (**E**113) I still have to condemn piracy in all forms, and I think **Edge** should too. Yes, the price of games could come down from their current lofty heights. However, if you can get a game for £2, or even free on the Internet, then any price point above that is too high. It is very naive to think that a realistic price drop of say £20 will make much of a difference. Simply, look at how mp3 has devalued the perceived value of music CDs. If you can get virtually the same product for basically nothing, without any risk, then a lot of people are going to do it. Although by the pirate's rationale, just because I can't afford a V12 Vanquish I should go out and steal one, as long as I know I won't get caught. Wrong.

The one argument that you can't argue with when it comes to piracy is that if there were no pirated games, most people would still play games. Back in the day I used to get VCS games twice a year: two for my birthday, two for Christmas. That made you hunger for the next title you would ask Santa for, which made it more special. It was always the unattainable dream to have all VCS games. Later when I got a Mega Drive I borrowed a copier and hundreds of games from a friend for a week, and having virtually all Mega Drive games at my disposal was no fun. I simply ended up playing the most immediate and instantly accessible games foregoing many quality titles, so I didn't buy a copier and went back to buying games. Related to this is the sub-par product that especially newer games turn into when burned. People with pirated DC games got certain games with no intros, no music, hell, some even had the later stages in the game taken out completely. Ripped DVDs burned onto CD-Rs will be even worse, leaving potential consumers with a bad impression of whatever game they experience in this sorry state. I personally think we need to make some cautionary examples out of playground pirates.
David Dahl-Hansson

Make no mistake, **Edge** condemns piracy. As you rightly point out the biggest problem is that games remain too expensive. And even if you don't agree, a price drop to, say, the £20 region would certainly transform matters (not only in terms of discouraging certain individuals from going down the piracy route but also in the way it may convince a few more non-gamers to join our ranks by presenting our pastime as far more affordable). Just look at how the Platinum label affected the sales of PS software (and now PS2), to this day the most convincing example of a reasonable price point that works.

As you obviously found out when you had your MD, other than financial issues, **Edge**'s particular gripe with pirated software is that often the gaming experience is devalued – it suddenly feels disposable, your personal investment in a title suffers. What are other readers' views on this?

Cel-shading always seems to spark some sort of light in the eyes of the 'videogame community' and in my opinion, rightly so. But I have to argue that this style may already be dead.

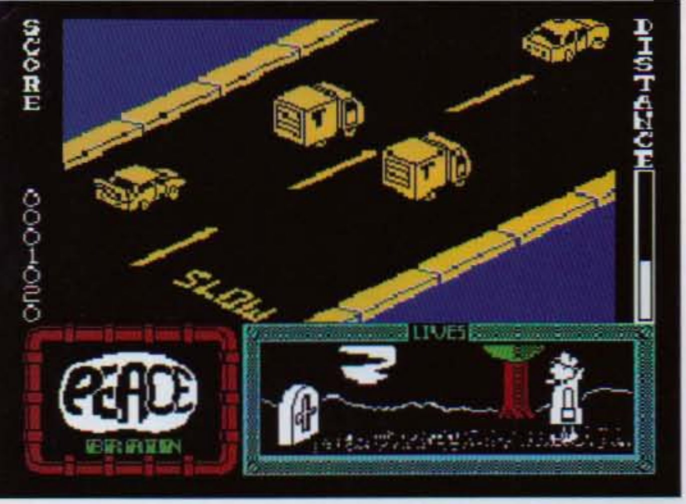
I brought a couple of copies of **Edge** with me on holiday, which my friends read. One was **E**112 that included a preview of GC *Legend of Zelda* which was immediately greeted with disgust by various friends. These friends of mine would be classed as 'casual gamers', although they do own both the N64 *Zelda* games, and are currently religiously struggling their way through GB Color *Zelda*. However, their opinion was purely based on the graphics which according to you were "one of the most stunning graphical treatments **Edge** has had the pleasure to encounter". A similar instance occurred when some other 'casual gamer' friends and I were enjoying an eightplayer *Halo* deathmatch when the game was switched to *Jet Set Radio Future*. This also was judged harshly on its ("dodgy") graphics, without a second thought.

I would argue that this is because 'casual gamers' want their games to look real, rather than like cartoons – they want to see lifelike graphics. They have paid money for a next-generation gaming system, mainly for better graphics which look more 'real'. Graphics are what makes or breaks games and given the vision of the 'casual gamer' cel-shading can never achieve commercial success with current western gamers.

It's quite possible that the great staff of Nintendo can use the magic of *Zelda* to make cel-shading appeal to the wider audience but at the moment it seems quite the opposite.
Dan Poltawski

I bought *SpyHunter* today, Friday June 28 (release day in UK), and took it back the same day. Why? Because I was so disgusted with it. I work in the software industry (as an artist) and to see a company like Midway peddling such a poor piece of software quite frankly astounded me. I was hoping to recreate or relive some of the classic gameplay of the original all those years before, but my dreams where utterly destroyed. I was surprised that Nintendo actually let this piece of crap on to the market. The list of technical

"If you can get a game for £2, or even free on the Net, then any price point above that is too high. It is very naive to think that a realistic price drop of £20 will make much difference"



John Tatlock, co-creator of *Agent X*, has been in touch to point out that the lead character was not based Ed Sludden's design after all (FAQ, E113)

atrocities in this game is unforgivable.

First up is the total lack of a 60Hz mode. Okay no biggy really, but not until you realise that the screen is compressed and that the dreaded black borders have returned. But not little half-inch borders, oh no – we are treated to about 1.25 inches at the bottom of the screen (this on a 14-inch TV and yes it can display 60Hz fine) if not more and about 0.75 inch at the top. I haven't seen this kind of thing since, well, PlayStation days. Oh, and the framerate is incredibly choppy, jumping wildly while the collision detection seemed virtually non-existent, too.

Next up is the awful FMV that looks suspiciously of PlayStation – or dare I say it, Saturn – quality. Totally unforgivable. The sound quality too is dire with ultra quiet in-game sounds and music and very loud audio on the FMV which deafens you when it switches to it.

The worst thing and quite how Nintendo ever let this out the door is the fact that none of the textures are bi-linear filtered. Are Nintendo's testers blind? Are Midway's testers blind? This is a basic feature of *all* next-gen consoles – it costs virtually nothing in terms of CPU or GPU time. I was literally falling off my chair in utter amazement.

If I were Nintendo I'd pull this game *now*. It does nothing for the image of GameCube or Midway. If this game is given any pod time in the shops people will flock to the Xbox or PS2 as soon as they see it.

I love the GameCube and up to now it's been brilliant. But I won't touch another Midway game again until I see it running on a GC beforehand. I think **Edge** should take this kind of software atrocity and publicly parade it in front of everyone on a regular basis. I wonder how many other companies are getting away with this and charging £37.99 for it too. Outrageous.

John Blythe

Edge hasn't had the pleasure of experiencing the GC *SpyHunter* port firsthand and reviewing many titles on import means we don't always get to see the state of PAL conversions. But the mag has, since **E**1, campaigned for properly optimised code and this continues to be an area of great concern. Perhaps readers could alert the editorial team (via letter, email or forum) whenever you come across a particularly bad culprit.

Reading issue E113's letter section I found a reader who was brave enough to disagree with you. I am of course referring to 'The Lord of the Rings' letter by Ted Forsyth. Like Teddy, I didn't agree with your opinion on the earlier mentioned movie, yet I didn't feel urged to write an angry letter. Because of the very simple reason that is was your opinion. Just an opinion. Yet **Edge** seems to think that everyone who disagrees with them doesn't know what they are talking about. So roughly this translates into this: Anyone who thinks 'The Lord of the Rings' is a good movie is a jackass, anyone who believes *Final Fantasy X* is a great game is an idiot, anyone who prefers *Street Fighter III 3rd* above *EX3* is full of shit. All this because they don't know what they are talking about.

You see, only **Edge** is right. Should you ever come across an **Edge** review that you disagree with, it is better to terminate your life immediately, because there is something very wrong with you.

As for me, I don't despise those who disagree with me, nor do I judge them in any way. **Edge** however seems to do so. And that is something I truly detest. So no money of mine will ever be spent at your arrogant, self-indulgent magazine again. To find a magazine that is as professionally produced as yours won't be an easy task. To find an honest magazine that has respect for its readers and their opinions will be, at least, slightly easier.

So long, you bunch of arrogant fools.

Bogard

That a select few clearly failed to detect the more tongue in cheek elements of **Edge**'s reply to Ted Forsyth's letter isn't particularly important (hopefully veteran readers got it) – after all, everyone is perfectly entitled to an opinion. Even a wrong one. On a serious note, we did find Forsyth's tone combined with his justification that popular support for a piece of entertainment somehow validates its worth and automatically cements opinion as fact, offensive.

Incidentally, you're right about the course of action should you ever disagree with one of our reviews. And good luck finding that other mag.

The other day I was playing *Legends of Wrestling*, then suddenly a message came up saying that my memory pack was corrupt and could not be used. I turned the machine off in the hope that it would fix itself. I turned it on the next day but it would not work and now it won't even register that it is in the slot. I have tried formatting it but it won't work. I have recently had a big ant problem and I was wondering if they could do any damage like this if they got inside the GameCube?

Paul Casey

While myrmecology isn't **Edge**'s speciality, we'd be very surprised if ants find wrestling games *that* objectionable. But insects and hardware don't mix.

I was pleased to see your gaming injuries review in **E**112, and I'd like to add a further medical difficulty. Myself and my friend Zaki lived over a shop for three years, during which time we dragged his stand-up *Asteroids* machine (original Atari, now needs repair) up three flights of stairs in order to satisfy our terrible addiction to the game.

After long games, (I played for many hours once to reach 1 million, for example) we would get terrible cramps. We used to sit on a bar stool we 'found' in order to play it. Often, despite being in post game scoring delight, I would be doubled up on the floor after games for minutes on end. Why? Well those cramps would arrive with a vengeance in the nether regions. We called it 'Roid Groin. It hurt.

Adam Porter

"Should you ever come across an **Edge** review that you disagree with, it is better to terminate your life immediately, because there is something very wrong with you"





'Are sequels evil?', asks James Bailey. Well not all, of course, it depends on the kind of sequel. *Super Mario Sunshine* – good. *Shadowman 2* – evil

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: **Sequels aren't all bad, are they?**
Poster: **James Bailey**
Apparently, sequels are hurting the industry and us games players. Who agrees with this? Is the videogame industry becoming stagnated in your view? Are sequels really that bad?

Poster: **Foz**
Sequels to videogames are similar to movie sequels. It's sadly too easy just to tread water (or release significantly lower quality product) when a brand establishes itself, and publishers (and their shareholders) will be more than happy to spend less money developing a title that will be a sure-fire hit (or will meet its profit expectations) over sinking more time/money into ensuring that consumers are also kept happy.

There are notable exceptions though – there are videogame sequels that surpass their forebears because the publishers/developers care enough about their artistic property enough to ensure that the best possible product is released (*Mario*, *Silent Hill*, *Resident Evil*, *Soul Edge/Blade/Calibur* to name a few).

Poster: **Tig**
If it wasn't for sequels, *Zelda* would be dimly remembered as a one-off NES game. So I think sequels aren't all evil. It depends how it's done; if you're adding to and refining the gameplay set down by the original game, then by all means go ahead, but if you're trying to resell an old idea...

Poster: **James Bailey**
I can't decide if paradigm shifts in console technology are the real reason for game creativity and originality, both for new games and sequels. You could argue that the *Mario* series before *Super Mario 64* could have eventually become repetitive sequels, due to the limitations the SNES's technology offered gameplay creativity and originality. If *Mario 64* had been on the SNES, I wonder if we would have complained that the franchise was starting to lack originality? There are only so many creative and original gameplay elements that can be achieved with sequels on a particular hardware format.

Now, I'm not saying that hardware dictates creativity and originality, but I'm sure it really does influence it. *Mario 64* in 3D being a perfect ten out of ten in **Edge** for example; the innovation of the series was only achievable through new console technology.

Poster: **2097**
I don't think it's sequels killing the market, but too many average games. It's not down to sequels, licences or even EA. Games such as *Endgame* and *Crash* are just as much to blame. For me it's the huge amount of 'good but could be a lot better' games which is turning my attention away from games – not a lack of good games or too many bad ones.

Poster: **SamSim**
I'm still waiting for *Spacewar! 2*.

Subject: **Really fecked off with thirdperson licensed bore-a-thons...**
Poster: **squirtle**
If I see another generic thirdperson fighter based on a licence I'm going to kill someone. *Buffy*, *Minority Report* and *MIB2* are the latest examples to raise my blood temperature. What's the point of gaining a licence and then just splurging it on generic rubbish? The video footage of *Minority Report* showed some guy running round, beating up loads of people, throwing them through windows, etc. Now, I haven't seen the film yet, but from the reviews I've read it's supposed to be something you have to think about, something with a bit of intellect. Not a generic adventure game. Surely this film deserved something along the lines of *Deus Ex*, a thinking man's game.

Subject: **Edge's Latest Cover**
Poster: **Phelan**
Pound for pound, it's top dollar. Euro'd be mad to miss out on yen another classic **Edge** cover.

Subject: **Ninja Garden**
Poster: **Maylance**
I keep misreading the title of the Tecmo game. Now in my mind it's a combination of deadly brutality set off by ornamental water features.

Subject: **Work Night Out**
Poster: **Sheriff Pacman**
I would rather chew my own legs off than be involved in another social situation with any of the plebs I find myself surrounded by. Advice please.

Poster: **bender**
Do what I always do – wander off to the kitchen in the pub that is through some door, a door that should really lead to the toilets. Offer the harassed chef some assistance and wander around looking at his bottles of herbs and spices. Eventually the chef will threaten you with his knife and the management will ask your party to leave. Never again will you be invited on a works night out.

"If I see another generic thirdperson fighter based on a licence I'm going to kill someone. What's the point of gaining a licence and then just splurging it on generic rubbish?"

Next month





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